

A Kiss to the Victor

by Fido

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Summary: By June (KaraOhki)Geraci and David Lindquist. What if Ranma HAD kissed Akane?

## 1. Default Chapter Title

A Kiss to the Victor July 5, 1999 A Ranma 1/2 fanfic by Hound & Cabbit Productions (David "Fido" Lindquist [fido@rma.edu] and June "KaraOhki" Geraci [karaohki@snet.net])

Ranma 1/2 was created by Rumiko Takahashi. We're just borrowing her characters for a little while.

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### Forward - A Note From The Authors

The idea for this fic came from a question posed to the people on the FFIRC: "What would have happened if Ranma REALLY kissed Akane during the 'Romeo and Juliet' storyline? David was the one who asked the question and June commented that she had a similar idea. What really got us started, though, was a suggestion made by Gary Kleppe that we should collaborate on it.

We started gathering ideas on how to do it from there. This will most likely be a multi-part fic detailing a developing relationship between the only confirmed (by Takahashi) in the Ranma 1/2 series: Ranma and Akane.

We also hope to address some of the true reasons behind their reluctance to act upon their hidden feelings for each other. Chapters 1 and 2 will deal with Ranma coming to terms with the fact that he cares for Akane. Chapters 3 and 4 will deal with the repercussions of his decisions, and Akane's responses to them. From there, the rest of the chapters will have to do with the effect their relationship is having on the other characters in Nerima.

This chapter takes place during the Romeo and Juliet storyline.

We would like to thank Gary Kleppe, Brad Crawford and all the others who helped to make this fic work.

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## Chapter 1

Kasumi turned off the downstairs lights, and climbed the stairs as quietly as she could. Everyone else in the Tendo home had gone to bed while she was finishing the rest of the housework. She checked to see if there was any light coming from underneath Akane's door, and sighed. If her sister had been awake, she would have gone in to talk with her about the way she'd been fighting with Ranma. Unfortunately, it had taken Kasumi a long time to finish cleaning up downstairs, and Akane was sleeping.

\*I just wish those two would stop fighting\* she thought.

The thought stayed with her as she undressed, and got into bed.

\*Can't Akane see that Ranma likes her? I can, just as clearly as I can see that she likes him. They're just SO stubborn!\*

Kasumi shook her head sadly, and turned off the lamp. She sighed once more, and whispered her last thought aloud: "I wish they would just admit it..."

And in the great workings that could be called Heaven, events began to be set in motion.

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Sitting down at her desk, Akane Tendo could barely contain herself.

\*I can't believe that they wanted ME!\* she thought. \*I've gotta write this down!\* She quickly opened her desk drawer and pulled out a locked book. Undoing the catch, she opened it to a blank page and began to write.

"Dear Diary,

The most wonderful thing happened today. The Drama Club asked me to be in their production of Romeo and Juliet. This time, it will be different. THIS time, I get to be Juliet, not Romeo! I want it to be perfect, Diary. I don't want anything to spoil my dream--not water curses, not rival fiancees, not magic, and NOT RANMA!"

Akane felt a slight pang of guilt as she looked at the last statement. She knew it wasn't Ranma's fault that their stupid fathers had engaged them to each other.

\*If only he wasn't such a jerk!\* Akane thought.

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Ranma watched from a quiet corner of the room as Akane sat with her sisters, smiling and laughing. He'd rarely seen her so enthusiastic.

Then Akane went upstairs rather early, leaving Ranma alone, and for some reason feeling lonely.

He sat quietly for a few minutes until he heard her door close. Letting out a sigh, he then got up and headed for the closest thing he could call a sanctuary: the Tendos' roof. Once he got there, the martial artist lay down and began to sort out some of his thoughts.

For once, Ranma felt regret for his actions. He'd teased Akane mercilessly about how she'd played Romeo when she was younger. The heir to Anything-Goes Martial Arts would be the first to admit that he didn't know much about 'Romeo & Juliet' but even he knew that Romeo was a man. Of course, he'd paid for the remarks in a painful manner, but still felt his conscience nagging him.

Ranma understood why it was bothering him, though. He'd gone too far with his teasing this time. What made it worse was the fact that, at the time, Ranma knew he was hurting Akane's feelings, but he went right ahead and did it anyway.

\*Why did I do that?\* he thought, as he watched the star-filled sky.  
\*Why is it that I always have to insult her? She can't help it if she's an uncute tomboy.\*

"Stupid uncute tomboy," he muttered as his eyes got heavy...

"You always call me uncute," a familiar voice called out.

Ranma turned and looked at sound of the voice. He saw Akane standing there, with an expression of hurt mixed with anger on her face. What struck him as odd about her appearance was that she was wearing her school uniform.

"If that's the way you feel," she continued, "then why did you kiss me?!?"

"T..that wasn't really ME!" he stammered out as he stood up. "I was in the Neko-ken! It was the c..c..cat!"

"Riiight! Sure it was!" she replied sarcastically. "Only one problem: we both know for a fact that the Neko-ken only suppresses your inhibitions!"

Ranma watched as her face turned red. "You wanted to kiss me and I want to know why!!!!"

"Why would I even WANT to kiss a tomboy like you!!!" Ranma shouted back.

"Oh? You don't want to kiss me, right?" she replied.

"Right!" Ranma said.

Suddenly, Akane's form began to shift. Her face contorted in an angle impossible for a human to do without serious pain. The effect also seemed to extend to her body and clothes. Ranma stared in shock at the now almost unidentifiable form in front of him. After a while, the figure took on a recognizable shape.

"Ranma maybe kiss Shampoo, then?"

"N-now wait a minute here..." Ranma stammered out.

Shampoo's form shifted again, changing to Kasumi.

"Would you like to kiss me, Ranma?"

"Uhhh...I...don't..."

Another shift.

"What about me, Ranma? I wouldn't mind if you kiss me... Of course I'll have to charge you for me to keep quiet about it afterwards," Nabiki chimed in.

Ranma backed up, and would have come close to falling off the roof, but he bumped into something. Spinning around, he stared into an old withered face.

"Well, I don't think you want to kiss me, do you, Groom?" Cologne said.

"AHHHHH!"

A ribbon wound around Ranma's waist, jerked him off his feet, and away from Cologne. He suddenly found himself much too close to Kodachi's lips. "Will you kiss me, Ranma-sama?" she asked.

"No!" he replied, working his way out of the ribbon. He spun away from her, only to notice that all the girls had surrounded him, each asking, in their own way, the same question: will you kiss me?

All of them, except one.

Akane stood at the same position she had been in when she told Ranma about the Neko-ken. She was silent and motionless, save for a single tear that rolled down her cheek. Ranma froze as he saw her. Then she whispered a single word.

"Why?"

For Ranma, the word was like an explosion. He suddenly saw three beings standing between him and Akane. Each one looked somewhat like Ranma. The first one was small: almost a child. He looked like he was mashed between great forces.

"Because I will not be forced into anything by anyone!!" the small Ranma said defiantly.

Ranma then looked at the second version of himself. This one was about his size but looked like a half man/half woman he had once seen on a tv show about circus freaks.

"Because you deserve to be kissed by a whole man," it stated, not even trying to keep the despair out of its voice.

The third Ranma was huge. He was easily twice Ranma's size, or would have been, if he wasn't sitting there with his knees crunched up to his chest, and his arms locked around his legs. Even though he was

gently rocking back and forth, Ranma could clearly see the look on his face. Fear. The kind of fear Ranma imagined his own face looked like whenever he saw a c...c...cat.

"Because," the third Ranma said, "I'm afraid that I'll let you in and be hurt when you leave."

Akane looked at the four Ranmas standing in front of her, and asked: "But do you WANT to kiss me?"

The original Ranma found himself saying the answer in unison with the other three.

"Yes..."

Ranma woke, to find himself still lying on the roof, feeling cold, tired and confused. He climbed down to his room, and let himself in.

\*Well...that was...weird. Must have been something I ate.\*

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Akane couldn't relax; she was too excited about the play. Tomorrow the club would hold tryouts for the role of Romeo, and she wondered who would be playing opposite her.

The director of the play had given Akane a booklet with various photographs of costumes for Juliet, and had asked her to look them over. She sat at her desk, chin in her hands, and imagined herself in the costumes, acting the role of Juliet. The book also contained pictures of costumes for Romeo, but at this point in Akane's mind Romeo was just a figure in a costume--a figure without a face. Akane closed her eyes and let her imagination take over. The figure's face became clear, and it was...Ranma?

Akane's eyes snapped open.

\*Why did I think of HIM?\* she thought, her face getting hot as she blushed. \*I don't want that BAKA to be in MY play! There must be dozens of boys who would do a better job.\*

She suddenly remembered that three of those 'dozens of boys' that wanted the role were Tatewaki Kuno, Happosai, and Hikaru Gosunkugi. The youngest Tendo daughter shivered.

\*Not one of them. Please.\*

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"Come on boy, training time!"

Ranma slowly stirred at the sound of his father's voice. He didn't really need this at the moment but knew that if he didn't get up, he'd be getting a different wake up call. A wet one.

"Yeah...yeah...I'm up," Ranma grumbled as he rose from his futon.

"You look like you haven't slept, boy," his father said. Then Genma looked at him with a sly smile. "You know, you'll sleep a lot better when you're married."

The sound of his voice had barely died when Genma found himself sailing out the window and towards the Tendo pond. \*Well, his reflexes are okay,\* was his thought just before he hit the water.

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Akane woke, and stretched. The sun was already streaming in through the window, and she smiled. \*What a beautiful morning,\* she thought.

Her smile faded when she sat up, and caught a glimpse of her desk. Her completed homework sat there, along with her diary, and a little booklet. Seeing the costume booklet caused Akane to remember the previous night, and her fantasy of Ranma in the Romeo costume.

\*I can't keep thinking about that\* Akane thought as she got up, walked over to the desk and put her diary away.

The sound of a splash made her look out the window. A damp panda was making his way out of the pond. Moments later, Akane saw Ranma land on the grass near his father and start throwing a barrage of kicks and punches at the panda. Genma was able to block most of them, however, and launch a counterattack, but Ranma dodged it easily.

As the two martial artists fought, it soon became obvious to Akane that Ranma was far more focused and determined in this 'sparring match' than usual. He was also winning quite easily. A tiny feeling of jealousy suddenly crept into her thoughts.

\*I wish he would fight me like that some time\* she thought. Sighing, she turned away from the window and prepared to get ready for school. A few seconds later, she heard the familiar sound of a splash coming from outside.

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Ranma was more than a little annoyed at his father. It wasn't being woken up by him earlier, nor was it his comment about how he looked that had caused the annoyance. For this morning, all it took was him pushing about marrying Akane, again! The young martial artist was determined to punish his father by giving him more than one dunking today.

"Old man," he said as he connected with a punch. "You're getting slow!"

Following up on the opening created by the punch, Ranma grabbed his dazed father, and prepared to toss him into the pond. Suddenly, his instincts told him that someone was the fight. He looked up to see that Akane was watching their battle.

The moment he saw her, an image popped into his head. It was of the two of them locked in an passionate embrace, with their lips touching in an equally passionate kiss. Normally, this image would've created

a slight feeling of enjoyment, only to be instantly smothered by denial that he would even WANT to kiss her.

This time though, it was different. He didn't feel the denial. As a matter of fact, he didn't feel any negative emotions at all. Only the enjoyment of the imagined kiss.

Akane left the window, and Ranma continued to look up. Unfortunately for him, he didn't notice the pair of wet paws grabbing his shirt until it was too late.

With a tremendous throw, Genma flung his son towards the pond. As the young martial artist flew through the air, he knew why he had messed up. He'd gotten distracted, and now he was going to pay for it.

SPLASH!

A drenched, female Ranma cursed as she slowly dragged herself out of the pond. A part of her wanted to place the blame for the loss squarely on Akane's shoulders. It was her fault she had gotten distracted! She directed a glare in the general direction of Akane's window. A few seconds later though he shook it off. \*Don't blame her for your screw-ups,\* Ranma thought as she squeezed some of the water out of her shirt. \*You know better!\*

Sighing, Ranma ignored Genma-panda as he admonished her for losing her focus, and headed toward the bath. She had no intention of going to school smelling like the pond.

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Akane was sipping her tea when the now-male Ranma came in and sat down beside her. Suddenly, Akane had a terrible time holding the cup steady, so she put it down as casually as she could.

For one brief instant, she had seen Ranma in Romeo's costume again.

\*What is the matter with me?\* she thought.

Not sure whether to be amused or angry at herself, Akane tried to chase away the mental image of Ranma standing below her balcony, and picked up her rice bowl.

She felt herself blushing, and tried to suppress the warm feelings that the image sparked.

\*Just eat your breakfast, and STOP thinking about it!\* she mentally told herself. She then took a glance at Ranma.

\*Stupid idiot!\* Akane thought angrily. \*This is all your fault!!\*

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Ranma was shoveling in his breakfast as fast as he could, while trying to prevent his father from taking any of it.

Then for, the second time that morning, Akane distracted him. He

stopped short, chopsticks halfway to his mouth, and took a good look at her.

\*Oh, great!\* he thought as he noticed the red coloring of her face.  
\*I wonder what she thinks I did this time?\*

Ranma mentally sighed as he returned to his meal. It took him a few seconds to realize that his food had disappeared. He glared at his father, who was innocently staring off in the opposite direction and attempting to whistle. Since he was still in panda-form, his efforts came out sounding like heavy breathing. A few seconds later, Genma-panda turned to his son and held up a sign.

(What?)

Ranma just shook his head and sighed.

\*This\* he thought as he got up and went to check his book bag, \*is going to be a looong day.\*

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Akane finished her breakfast a few minutes after Ranma had left. She was starting to get up when Kasumi stopped her.

"Are you feeling well, Akane?"

"I'm fine, Sis," she curtly replied. "Excuse me, I have to get ready."

"Are you sure?" Kasumi said. "You look rather flushed. Let me check and see if you're running a fever."

Akane's face became several shades redder.

"I SAID I'M JUST FINE!" she yelled. "DON'T BABY ME!"

Akane stopped short, and looked at the faces around the table.

Soun looked at his daughter in disbelief, while Nabiki seemed amused. Mr. Saotome had already risen and shuffled off, apparently wanting to stay as far away from the problem as possible.

Akane looked at Kasumi last. Her sister looked confused and hurt, and Akane instantly became consumed with guilt.

"I-I'm sorry, Sis," Akane stammered out. "Guess I'm more nervous about the play than I thought. Excuse me."

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From then on, the rest of the day went just like usual, with few exceptions. First of all, Ranma and Akane didn't speak to each other at all. Secondly, Ranma was staring at Akane more but trying not to let her know it. Finally, Akane was staring at Ranma, trying to do so without letting him notice.

Needless to say, the other students soon became witnesses to the first Martial arts 'staring without getting caught' contest, some of

them wondering who would win while the others wondered who would get whiplash first from all the head movements. Finally though, the time for the tryouts came, without either one of them getting caught by the other.

Some of the students were interested enough in what was (or wasn't) going on between Ranma and Akane to follow them to the tryouts for the play.

The first thing Akane noticed when she got to the audition was that there were a lot of male students there. She overheard them reading various parts of the play aloud. Akane's spirits started to rise higher when she realized that most of them were reading Romeo's lines.

\*There sure are a lot of people trying for Romeo\*, she thought.  
\*Maybe one of...\* The rest of her thoughts were interrupted suddenly when some of the male students began to be tossed around.

Over the commotion it caused she could clearly hear a voice shout out:

"Away, vermin! None of you are fit to be Romeo!! Only I, Tatewaki Kuno, am worthy to be the fair Akane's Romeo!"

As she watched him tear through the assembled boys, Akane's spirit started to plummet.

Its descent slowed slightly when something hit Kuno so hard that he fell over flat onto his back. The hesitation was short, however, when she realized what had hit him.

"No way! I'm going to be Juliet's main squeeze!" Hoppoai shouted.

Akane's spirit went from plummet to total freefall.

Hoppoai jumped over Kuno's body and made a beeline towards Akane.

"Cmon, sweetie, time for rehearsal. Let's start with a lov--"

Hoppoai's words were cut off when a foot embedded itself right in his face.

\*Thank goodness\* Akane thought.

"Hey, Director," Ranma called out, his foot still placed firmly on Hippi's face, pinning the old hentai to the ground. "You let old geezers like this try out?"

"SAOTOME!! YOU WILL NOT TAKE THE ROLE OF ROMEO FROM ME!!" a recovered Kuno yelled as he charged at him.

Ranma stood there as the kendoist raced towards him, wildly waving his bokken. Just as it looked as if Kuno would strike him with it, Ranma sidestepped him, and the blows meant for Ranma rained down on Hoppoai.

Kuno stood triumphantly over his fallen foe, while Ranma stepped back a few feet just to get out of Kuno's vision.

"At last, Saotome, you know the full wrath of the Blue Thunder of Furinkan High!"

"You really got him this time, did you?" Hoppo said as he perched upon Kuno's shoulder.

"Aye," Kuno responded.

"Only one problem," the old pervert said.

"Eh?"

"THAT WASN'T RANMA! IT WAS ME!" Hoppo replied. He then began to show Tatewaki Kuno just exactly why he was a master.

WHACK! BASH! CRUNCH!!

Despite the punishment Hoppo had given Kuno, his single-minded ambition to be Romeo still motivated him. He raised his head, and looked directly at Ranma.

"You will NOT take my place as Romeo in this play!"

"Who wants to be in this dumb play, anyway?"

Ranma felt something big hit him from behind.

"Then what are you doing here?!?" Akane screamed, letting go of the balcony she'd hit him with.

"I didn't think you'd want the old goat to grab you!" he replied, rubbing his head.

"I could have handled him, you know!" Akane said.

"Ah...fair Aka...OOF!!" Kuno said as Ranma's and Akane's fists connected with his stomach simultaneously.

"Against him?!?" Ranma replied, pointing at the old pervert as he downed a bottle of sake. "You can't even beat Shampoo!"

Knowing he had won the argument, Ranma turned towards the boys who had stayed. Suddenly, he saw them all begin to slowly back away from him.

\*Huh?\* he thought, a little confused at their actions.

"RRRRAAANNMMMAAA!" Akane roared.

\*Oops!\*

Fifteen minutes later...

Akane stood in the recently replaced balcony and looked down at the area they had set aside for the tryouts.

\*This is it!\* she happily thought. \*I'm finally going to play Juliet!\*

Crunch....

\*No one is going to ever say I'm better as Romeo again!\*

Crunch..

Irritably, she glanced up at one of the higher branches of the tree where the balcony had been placed and scowled. There, she saw a very bruised Ranma eating some crackers.

Ranma soon noticed that she was staring at him.

"Want some?" he asked.

"Idiot" Akane muttered as she turned her attention back to the tryouts...

Ranma continued to munch on the crackers while he watched the tryouts. He'd quickly come to the conclusion that most of the guys wanted to play Romeo because Akane was Juliet.

\*Why would they want to be in a play with Akane? She's so violent that if they make a mistake, she'll pound them. I just don't know what they see in that uncute girl.\*

Uncute.

Ever since this morning, every time he had thought of her as that it had bothered him. The worst part was he really wasn't sure why. He knew it had something to do with that strange dream. Why did he want to kiss her? Could it be that Akane really was cute? All the other guys at school kept saying that she was. As Ranma stared at the Tendo girl, he had a revelation.

There had been moments where he had thought she was cute. However, each time it happened, either he would chalk it up to him being sick or one of them would do something to mess it up. Or more accurately, he would do something to mess it up. Suddenly, the words the third Ranma said played through his mind.

\*I'm afraid that I'll let you in and be hurt when you leave.\*

\*Is that it? Do I call her uncute because I'm afraid to let myself like her? NO WAY! Ranma Saotome isn't afraid of ANYTHING!\*

\*Akaneiscute.... There! I admit it.\* Ranma thought. \*Now, so long as I don't have to let her know about it until I'm ready, there won't be a problem.\*

Ranma pushed the thoughts aside, and looked down from his perch. The director had finally brought the group to some semblance of order, and was having the students do brief readings from the play.

The group of Romeo-wannabes had dwindled considerably. Most of them decided it would be much healthier to leave than try to compete with Kuno, Happi or possibly Ranma. Of those that remained, some of the

boys found themselves completely tongue-tied when it was their turn to read, mostly due to the glares from Kuno and Hoppo. Others, once they got near to Akane and realized they were supposed to read romantic lines to her, just went to pieces. Soon the only ones yet to read were Kuno, Hoppo and Gosunkugi.

To everyone's amazement, the self-styled voodoo priest had stuck it out. Well, to the amazement of everyone who noticed him, that is.

Hikaru was ready to begin reading, when someone roughly pushed him aside.

"Stand aside! I shall go first!"

Kuno stood straight, held out his book, and began to recite. It didn't surprise anyone that he was letter-perfect. After all, he spoke as though he was in a Shakespeare play every day of his life. The only problem was that he was reading the wrong part, from the wrong play, and it wasn't even written by Shakespeare.

Hoppo walked around Kuno, and gazed up at Akane. His intense stare made her very uncomfortable.

"I'm the only Romeo for you, sweets!"

He immediately opened the script he had 'found' during his morning raid of the girls' locker room, turned to a random page, and began to read. Unfortunately, he'd had a little too much to drink, and what he did read came out rather mangled. It also didn't help that he was reading Juliet's lines. When the director tried to correct him, he found himself flat on his back.

Kuno grabbed Hoppo by his shirt, and shouted at him. "You dare be foul the immortal words of Shakespeare?"

Before he could continue. Hoppo had flung him up into the tree, where he narrowly missed landing on Ranma.

By this time, the director had picked himself up, and was bewailing his bad luck. "This is terrible! How can we find a Romeo this way?"

He flung down his copy of the play, and softly muttered another complaint.

"Now our poor students will never get to enjoy that invitation to see China." Ranma's eyes went wide. \*See China?!?\*

Images of him taking various transports back to the country that lodged perhaps the only known cure to his curse, flooded his mind. No matter how he went, it all ended the same. Him at Jusenkyo and bathing in the spring of the drowned man. Then the image shifted, showing him returning to Nerima, a full man and holding Akane in his arms....

\*I've got to win this contest!\*

Ranma quickly shoved Kuno out of the tree, and used him as a 'pillow' to land on.

"Did you say CHINA?" he shouted towards the director.

The director nodded.

"You got yourself a Romeo."

Ranma's words rang in Akane's ears. Her daydream was coming back to haunt her.

\*What am I going to do? I can't play Juliet to Ranma's Romeo. I can't do it.....Can I?\* Her thoughts were interrupted by a couple of shouts.

"NEVER!!!"

"NO (hic) WAY!"

Ranma ducked under Kuno's bokken swing just in time to see an angry Hoppoai begin his attack. Thinking fast, Ranma grabbed the middle of Kuno's bokken and used it as a lever to block, and then threw Hoppoai up in the tree. Almost instantly after Hippi had been launched, Ranma kicked Kuno square in the chest, knocking him out.

Just as the battle was winding down, Akane saw Gosunkugi shout, "STOP THE MADNESS!" and charge towards the back of Ranma, armed with his voodoo spike. She was about to shout a warning to him when she saw Ranma turn and catch the spike between his fingers.

"Huh?" Ranma replied casually, the spike still trapped between two of his fingers.

Despite the casualness in his voice, Gos could see the anger in Ranma's eyes.

"Ahh...I-I mean, since this is a play..." he stammered out, hoping to distract Ranma from doing very grevious bodily harm to him. By now, Ranma had broken the wooden spike in two, and grabbed Gos by the shirt. The look on his face said simply: YOU'RE NEXT!

"...We should settle this on the stage."

By this time, Kuno had recovered enough to comment.

"Hmm. . .an amusing thought. Then the last one left standing on stage, will be the one true Romeo!"

The director nodded enthusiastically in agreement because, quite frankly, he liked not being beaten into a bloody pulp.

"A battle Royal? You're on!" Ranma replied.

None of them noticed Gos shaking his head in disbelief.

"That's not what I meant," he mumbled.

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Akane couldn't believe it! In mere minutes, her dream of playing Juliet was turning into a nightmare! All because of that stupid pervert! Rolling up her script, she leaped down from the balcony and swatted Ranma with it.

"IDIOT!" she screamed as she felt the tears well up in her eyes.  
"We're supposed to be doing a play, not a massacre!!"

If she hadn't been so upset, she would have noticed the look of hurt on his face.

"Akane, I..." he replied.

Now crying, she slapped him across the face.

"Now you've ruined everything!"

As she ran away, all of Akane's thought revolved around one question.  
\*Why? Why does he always have to ruin everything for me!?!\*

-----

Ranma eyes followed Akane as she fled the tryouts. He'd hurt her again. The heir to Anything-Goes martial arts could have shrugged it off except for one thing.

He'd made her cry.

As he clenched his fists and lowered his head, he tried to control the swirl of emotions the incident had ignited in him.

"Damn," he whispered.

-----

That evening after dinner, Ranma quietly crept into the kitchen. He noticed that Kasumi was still washing the dishes, so he decided to wait until she was finished before he would bother her.

He'd arrived home a few minutes before dinner and had just enough time to ask his pop about who Romeo was. His response about him being from Krypton didn't make much sense to the martial artist. He decided afterwards that it might be a good idea to ask someone else about it. Almost instantly he ruled out asking Soun, the question would have brought on a torrent of tears about how his daughter's fiance wanted to be in the play. He thought about asking Nabiki but realized that he probably couldn't afford the money she'd charge him for the information. That left either Akane or Kasumi but the way Akane glared at him during dinner pretty much ruled her out.

Noticing that Kasumi had put away the last dish, Ranma spoke.

"Kasumi, got a minute?"

"What is it, Ranma?"

Ranma shifted nervously from foot to foot, then just before he spoke, he took a big breath.

"Do you know who Romeo is? Pop says he's some guy from Krypton, but I don't think that's right."

Kasumi couldn't help laughing.

"Ranma, that's Superman," she said, still giggling. Then she shook her head. "Don't you know anything about Romeo and Juliet?"

"Well...um...I know Romeo is a guy," he replied sheepishly. "Isn't it a Samurai drama about a father and his daughter?"

"Here" Kasumi said. Walking over to the counter, Kasumi picked up a book and handed it to the confused Ranma.

"This is a copy of the play. When Akane told me you were trying out for the part, I got this out of my room."

Kasumi noticed Ranma's face falter slightly at the mention of Akane. Akane had told her sister what had happened at the tryouts, but she knew that her sister had a tendency to blame everything on Ranma.

\*Ranma looks upset. I wonder what really happened at the tryouts.\*

Brushing aside her concern, Kasumi smiled slightly. "I figured you would need it."

"Is she okay?" Ranma asked, taking the book from her.

"The last time I checked on her, she was still a little angry," she responded.

"I noticed," he said. "Well, thanks for the book, Kasumi. This is exactly what I needed. Good night."

As he turned to leave, Kasumi gently grabbed his arm. "Ranma, this play is very important to Akane. Please don't ruin it for her."

Ranma looked into the pleading eyes of the eldest Tendo daughter.

"I..I won't," he stammered out.

After Ranma left the kitchen, Kasumi took off her apron. She was folding it up when she started to giggle.

\*Superman? Poor Ranma. Wait 'til he finds out what the play is REALLY about.\*

-----

Ranma fled to the sanctuary of his bedroom, and began reading.

\*Huh? Where are the samurai?\*

\*Romeo's NOT Juliet's Dad?\*

\*Waitaminit! This is a LOVE story!!!\*

A few minutes later, the book flew across the room, and hit the wall.

Ranma decided it was time for bed. His mind kept returning to the same thought. Romeo loved Juliet. Romeo kissed Juliet. Therefore, Ranma would have to kiss Juliet...err...Akane.

\*Could I do that? Yes I could, but I won't do it to win that contest! I don't need to!!\*

Even as he lay down on the futon, he was trying to convince himself that he could win without kissing her.

It was going to be a long night.

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Comments welcome - send to the list, or to either (or both) of us  
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## 2. Default Chapter Title

From: KaraOhki Subject: [Ranma][FanFic] A Kiss to The Victor,  
Chapter 2 Date: Wednesday, November 24, 1999 12:02 AM

A Kiss to the Victor August 18, 1999

A Ranma 1/2 fanfic by Hound & Cabbit Productions (David "Fido" Lindquist [fido@rma.edu] and June "KaraOhki" Geraci [karaohki@snet.net])

Ranma 1/2 was created by Rumiko Takahashi. We're just borrowing her characters for a little while.

## CHAPTER TWO

As the residents of the Tendo home woke the next morning, none of them would have believed that Akane was already up. She hadn't slept well at all the night before. The reason for that was due to the mess the tryouts had become after Ranma butted in.

\*I can't believe that idiot!!\* Akane thought as she paced the length of her bedroom. \*He turned the play upside down just so he can win a trip to China!\*

\*I know he'd use the trip to find a cure,\* she thought, then let out a sigh. \*But why does he have to ruin my chance to play Juliet to do it?!?\*

Suddenly questions arose in her mind. Questions that she'd rather not have thought of. Feeling a little unsteady, Akane sat down on the bed.

\*Will Ranma come back once he's cured? Will I ever see him again?\*

She shook her head violently, as if to make the thought go away.

\*Why would I even want that pervert back? All he has ever done is cause me problems.\*

The thoughts of what her life was like before she met Ranma drifted through Akane's mind. Kuno's advances. The morning battles at Furinkan High. The whispers about what kind of monster she would have for a boyfriend if she lost. Though she never would admit it, that thought alone terrified her.

Then there was the way her friends would look at her after they talked about their dates, a look of pity for her plight which only served to make her more angry and lonely.

Ranma's arrival had changed all that. The morning battles stopped. Kuno still annoyed her, but Ranma was there to keep him out of her hair. Instead of pity, her friends were actually jealous because she had such a handsome fiance.

The next thought almost caught in her throat.

She didn't feel alone anymore.

Thoughts of him gone suddenly didn't sound so good.

\*I'm not going to think about it. What's important now is the play. If we win, and Ranma goes to China, maybe...\*

Akane gulped at the next thought.

\*Maybe I can go with him.\*

Akane wasn't ready for the torrent of emotions that exploded within her. Anger. Fear. Longing. Desire?

\*I can't look at him this morning. I'll give myself away. W-what would he do if he found out?\*

Akane then took a deep breath and stood up. \*Maybe\* she thought \*I should just stay out of his way for now. I think I'll wait for Nabiki this morning and walk with her.\*

Ranma walked to the corner and looked back at the Tendo home. Ever since he'd arrived in Nerima, he and Akane had walked to school together, even if she was furious at him. It felt funny leaving without her, but Kasumi had told him to...

Ranma kept looking at Akane's empty place as he ate his breakfast. He was nearly finished, and she still hadn't come down.

"Kasumi, where's Akane?" he asked.

Kasumi turned around and looked at him.

"Akane needed a few more minutes to get an assignment done," she

said, an uncertain and worried expression on her face. "She'll be down later. Perhaps you should leave without her."

"Well, I don't..." he started to reply.

"Besides," she interrupted. "if you leave early, it'll give you a chance to read some more about the play."

Soun, who had been listening to the conversation, lowered his newspaper and spoke.

"You do want to learn more about the play so you can do your best for my daughter, don't you?"

"Why would I want to--" Ranma started to reply.

Suddenly Soun's head grew to ten times its normal size and a forked tongue came out of his mouth.

"YOU DO WANT TO DO YOUR BEST FOR YOUR FIANCEE, DON'T YOU?!" he roared.

"O-of course," Ranma stammered out as he shied away from the Demon-Head attack.

"Then go ahead and leave early so you can get a copy of the play," Soun said, returning to normal. "I'm sure she will meet you there."

"But why would I do that when I already got a copy right here?" Ranma replied pulling out the copy that Kasumi gave him.

Soun stared at Ranma as if his future son-in-law had just handed him a million yen.

Genma, who was eating beside his son, also stared at him.

"What's the matter, Pop? I grow an extra head or something?"

Ignoring Ranma's comment, Genma stood up and walked over to his friend and embraced him.

"Our houses will be united soon!"

"Jeeze, it's just a play," Ranma muttered. He got up, and Kasumi handed him his lunch.

\*I'd better get out of here before they start measuring me for a tuxedo.\*

As his thoughts drifted back to the events, he realized that Kasumi had looked rather...odd. Like she wasn't her normal self.

\*Oh man,\* he thought. \*I hope she ain't coming down with something. That would mean that Akane would have to cook!\* Images of dishes filled with various lethal-looking foods assailed his mind. His stomach involuntarily contracted, and he felt a little queasy.

\*Hmm...if she is sick, maybe I should offer to help her...\* The image flashed through his mind of asking Akane to help with dinner. The NEXT image was of himself flying through space, courtesy of Akane Air.

\*Maybe I'll just eat out tonight,\* he thought.

Ranma sighed, and then pulled the book Kasumi had given him out of his pocket.

\*Oh well, as long as she's not here, I can read some more.\*

Ranma opened the book of Romeo and Juliet and started reading. Walking along, Ranma became immersed in the words of the book. He never saw the water coming until it was too late. Then he was soaking wet, female, and furious.

"What the hell??" Ranma shouted.

"HEHEHE!...Look at you! Why don't you give up playing Romeo and try for Juliet!" Happousai called out. "You most definitely have the body for it!"

Ranma spun just in time to see the little panty thief with an now empty bucket in his hand. Almost by reflex, she clobbered him with a kick, sending him up into the sky.

"Stupid pervert," she muttered.

Making sure that no one else was around, Ranma resumed her reading and once again headed for school. \*You know, this stuff isn't bad,\* she thought, as she turned the corner.

"OOF!"

Ranma had run into something solid. No, not something, someone. Slowly Ranma peeked over her book to see who it was she hit.

"Ah, my pigtailed goddess," the someone said. "Fate has truly smiled on me this day."

"Oh no," she grumbled. "Not him."

Tatewaki Kuno just smiled at her.

"So I see you too have an interest in the bard. Even though I am destined to be sweet Akane's Romeo, I would gladly practice my lines with you."

Before Ranma could back away, Kuno wrapped his arms around her.

"Let us start with the farewell kiss," he proclaimed.

Five minutes later...

Ranma rubbed her knuckles and looked at the heap that used to be Tatewaki Kuno.

\*That guy just can't get a clue, can he?\*

Realizing that the kendoist wasn't going to be getting up any time soon, Ranma resumed her walk to school.

-----

Akane waited a few minutes after Ranma left before she came out of her room and walked over to Nabiki's door.

As they came downstairs together, the first thing they heard was a lot of thumping. Genma and Soun were doing a strange sort of dance, waving little fans around, and singing at the top of their lungs. The girls tiptoed past them, took their lunches from the kitchen, and left the house.

"They've finally cracked," remarked Akane.

After they left, Genma immediately went over to the phone. Grinning madly, he started to dial a special number, a phone number that he and Soun had been saving for just this moment. A few rings later, a man's voice answered. "Shijun temple. May we help you?"

"Yes," Genma replied. "We need a priest."

-----

The first person to come across Kuno was Gosunkugi. He looked carefully at the damage and concluded that Ranma had been there.

\*He must be just ahead!\* he thought, pulling a pigtailed voodoo doll and a spike out of his pocket. \*Now's my chance!\*

Gosunkugi ran as fast as he could in the direction of Furinkan High, hoping to catch up to Ranma before he got there. Soon, he caught sight of female Ranma walking casually down the sidewalk, reading a book.

Moving with unusual care he slowly and quietly caught up with her. With sweaty hands, Gosunkugi crept up behind her. \*It's almost over.\*

He raised his arm in preparation to strike his unsuspecting victim in the back. The only problem was that his victim wasn't unsuspecting.

"Don't even think about it," Ranma growled.

Hikaru Gosunkugi backed up as Ranma turned to face him. He froze under the furious gaze. \*She looks even madder than yesterday!\* he thought.

Now faced with an opponent that he couldn't escape, fight or even beg not to hurt him, Gosunkugi did the only thing possible. He fainted.

-----

Some distance behind them, Akane and Nabiki were inspecting Kuno's unconscious form.

"Ranma did this, I'm sure of it."

"Well, Kuno-baby most likely had it coming."

A short time later, they came across Gosunkugi's body.

"Not a mark on him. I wonder..."

Akane couldn't help but grin.

"I'll bet Ranma scared him to death."

Nabiki smirked. "That wouldn't take much effort."

Gosunkugi took that moment to open his eyes and mumble.

"I'm not dead."

Akane then bent down and gently shook his shoulder. "Hey Hikaru?" she asked. "Are you okay?"

The collapsed boy sat up with such speed that both Akane and Nabiki jumped back in surprise.

"S...SHE TOUCHED ME AND TALKED TO ME!!" he declared.

The voodoo priest's face lit up. He could NOT believe it. Akane had... she had... shown concern for him! Unfortunately, his fragile body couldn't take the strain, so Gos prompted fainted again.

Akane and Nabiki's eyes met across his still figure.

"Well," Nabiki finally said "let's go. We're going to be late for school."

Akane turned to her sister.

"We can't just leave him here, Nabiki!"

Nabiki looked at her sister as well.

"Do YOU want to carry him to the nurse's office?"

"Umm...well...." Akane stammered. She then glanced down at her wrist. "Oh boy, look at the time. Let's go, Nabiki, before we're late! We'll just tell the school nurse where to find him when we get there."

With that said, the two girls ran down the sidewalk as fast as they could go.

-----

As a now male Ranma waited in class, he continued to think about the play. He hadn't finished reading it yet, but there already was one scene he was going to have a problem with.

\*Aw man, I have to kiss Akane.\*

The thought went through his head, causing him to ask himself a question.

\*Now why is this a bad thing?\*

It took him a little while to figure out the answer.

\*I don't want my and Akane's first kiss to be on stage, in front of the whole school! She's gonna hate it.\* Then he thought sadly: \*so will I.\*

He sat there for a few minutes and mulled the problem over in his mind before he came up with the answer.

\*I can tell her that we won't do the kissing scene. She'll agree with me then we can...\*

Ranma's thoughts were interrupted when Akane, Yuka and Sayuri ran in, somewhat out of breath.

Akane saw Ranma watching her. She glared at him angrily, then went to her desk.

\*What's wrong with her?\* he wondered. \*She's the one who was late!\*

-----

Akane's day was already starting to go downhill. All morning, the only subject her friends wanted to talk about was who would play Romeo. What had angered her the most concerned their most frequently asked question: "Do you think Ranma will get the role?" Every time one of them asked, her reply was the same: "I don't care!" However, she couldn't decide if that was the truth, or if she was making that response out of habit.

As Akane sat at her desk and waited for the next teacher to arrive, she started to review what had happened earlier that morning. When she had asked Kasumi to lie for her, the eldest Tendo daughter had given her a very upset look.

"Why do you want me to tell him that?" she said. "You finished your homework last night."

"I know that, Sis," Akane responded. She thought about lying to her then dismissed it. The few times she had done that made her feel horrible. "I have some things to think about, and I can't do it while he is hanging around me."

Letting out a sigh, Kasumi closed her eyes.

"All right," she said, "but I don't think it's proper."

"Thanks Sis!"

After seeing the aftermath of Ranma's walk to school, Akane was glad that he'd left on his own. It had allowed her time to get a grip on her emotions. She now had them under control. At least she did until

her friends started harassing her about the play...and him. Now she became more determined not to have anything to do with him for the simple reason that it would feed the rumor mill. She'd even ignored him when he attempted to apologize for his part in messing up the audition.

She knew that she wasn't giving him a chance to make it up to her, but she was still afraid that he would see through her pretense of indifference to him. \*Besides,\* she thought, \*he deserves to be miserable for what he did at the tryouts!\*

-----

\*Man,\* Ranma thought as he glanced at Akane. \*If she gets any colder I'll freeze solid.\*

She hadn't so much as looked at him all day. At first he'd hoped she would calm down by lunch. but as that time approached, the hope had died a slow death.

\*I wish I knew what to say to her. She has never been this mad before!\*

The fact that she actually WAS this mad at him wasn't doing anything for his own mental well-being. He was starting to get a little depressed, which he found most unnerving.

It was then that a thought occurred to him. \*Maybe I should give up being in the play? I mean, if she is this upset that I'm trying out, how mad will she be when I win?\*

Ranma shook his head. He didn't like the thought of losing his chance to go to China. Oddly enough, he realized that he hated the thought of Kuno, Gosunkugi, or Hoppo getting the role even more. As soon as he thought about them getting the role, an image of Akane kissing each of them ran through his mind.

\*Unuh! No way any of them are...\* he angrily thought, then stopped when out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of Akane sitting ramrod straight in her seat. The anger he felt drained away when he sighed.

\*I won't like it, but if Akane wants me out of the play...I'll do it.\* Then he gasped, and sat up straight.

\*Hey! If she does and our school wins, maybe Akane will take me with her...Hm.\*

Even though that cheered him up a little, Ranma felt that it wouldn't be much of a consolation prize.

-----

Akane couldn't believe it. Though they couldn't bring it up during class (for which Akane was eternally grateful,) it seemed that every other free moment was wasted because all her friends wanted to talk about the play.

By the end of the day, Akane had no more patience for the subject. All she wanted to do was go home and hide in her room.

\*What is it with everyone?!\* she thought as she headed for home.  
\*Every question they asked was the same! Do you think Ranma will win?  
Wouldn't it be romantic if he did?\*

"Romantic? That idiot couldn't even find the word in the dictionary!"

Akane gasped when she realized she had spoken aloud. She looked around to see if anyone was nearby, and, to her chagrin, discovered Ranma standing on the fence above her.

"So, you're still mad at me," he said.

Akane looked at him. A brief expression of shock crossed her face before it was smothered by an angry glare.

"Why shouldn't I be?" she spat out. "You're making a mess out of this production. It's supposed to be a SERIOUS play, not a farce!"

"I know that, Akane. I read it."

"Y...you read it?" she stammered. She felt--what? Joy? Warmth? Happiness? The emotions from that morning returned with the force of a tidal wave. She felt a tear roll down her cheek.

"Akane?" he asked.

"I...I've got to go!" she said, and started running away from him as fast as she could.

"Akane!"

She kept going, blinded by her tears. Suddenly, Ranma appeared in front of her. How had he done that?

"Akane," he said. "I don't like it when you get this upset. Do you want me out of the play?"

Akane just stood there in silence. She couldn't believe her ears. Ranma was actually concerned about the way she felt? The warm feeling was coming back, even stronger than before. However, it was soon followed by a feeling of guilt.

"I don't care," she replied, angrily wiping the tears from her eyes.  
"If you want to be in the play, go ahead and try out."

"Good," he said, and placed his hands on her shoulders. "Because I want to play Romeo, and I want you to play Juliet."

Akane's eyes bulged out as she just stared at him.

"R-Ranma? Y-you know what Romeo and Juliet are to each other, right?"

"Yes, I do," he replied solemnly, "but I just want to get one thing straight. I ain't doing the kissing scene."

Suddenly, Ranma saw a familiar look on Akane's face. He also felt the tension in her shoulders jump dramatically but he ignored it.

"That's because..."

"What makes you think I'd even CONSIDER kissing you, you pervert!"

WHAM!!

The next thing Ranma knew, he was sailing through the air. He completed his remark, even though he was too far up for Akane to hear.

"...I don't want our first real kiss to be part of a play."

"Idiot!" Akane screamed, as she watched Ranma disappear over the horizon.

-----

The next few days fell into a surprisingly predictable pattern. Ranma and Akane would walk to school. During that walk, Ranma would get attacked by Kuno, Hoppo, and Gosunkugi. After he beat them, they would go to class for the morning, where at some point at least one of his rivals would make another attempt on him.

At lunch, the two would sit together and talk about the play. Though it was rather awkward, with Ranma trying to avoid any reference to the kissing scenes, they actually found that it was nice knowing that they could talk about something that didn't involve martial arts or fiancees.

The afternoon classes would almost be a repeat of the morning routine. The only difference being the opponent.

But what they considered the best part of the day was when they walked home. As they walked, one of them would start reciting a scene from the play, then the other would respond. This would go on until they neared the dojo. Both of them realized that this wouldn't be a good thing to do in front of their fathers.

The rest of the time they would spend separately, going about their normal routine. Throughout all this, neither one of them realized that something was missing. They hadn't argued once during the entire time they were together.

-----

The official rehearsals were not as simple. First off, the director announced that they would only be doing two scenes: the balcony scene and the final death scene. Though Kuno, Hoppo, and Gosunkugi weren't disappointed at this, Ranma and Akane were.

Then came the actual rehearsal. It didn't take long for the director to figure out that he could not have all of the Romeos together at rehearsals. They could not be on the same stage without trying to kill one another. After the set had to be rebuilt twice, he got an idea.

They would hold closed and locked rehearsals with himself, Akane, and each of the Romeos. The director, however, wasn't prepared for Akane's reaction.

"You want me in a locked room with those perverts?"

The words had barely left her lips before she regretted them. Ranma was looking at her, and it was obvious that he was hurt. She was trying to think of a way to apologize when Kuno swept her up into a hug.

"A chance to be alone with thee, Akane Tendo! Our rehearsal shall be glorious!"

Almost instantly, Kuno found himself on his back. Ranma stood over him, looking so angry that Kuno actually felt a tiny bit of fear.

"Get this straight, Kuno. This is a REHERSAL. It isn't a license to grope her whenever you feel like it."

Ranma cracked his knuckles.

"And if I hear that you did try to do it..."

He didn't need to complete his sentence.

Kuno got off the floor, dusted off his clothes, and glared at Ranma.

"Saotome, you may be assured that I will be a gentleman. I suggest that when it is your turn, you do the same."

The response Ranma gave wasn't what any of them expected.

"What me and my fiancee do is our business. Not yours."

The whole auditorium fell silent. Hoppo and Gosunkugi both stared at Ranma. Happi smirked as he did, while Gos had an expression that bordered on true horror. Akane blushed then glared at Ranma. The director and the stagehands just stood looking at the others in confusion. But the most visible reaction came from Kuno.

His whole face turned red with rage, and his body quivered slightly. Ranma, on the other hand, didn't move at all. He just stood there with his head bowed slightly. Kuno was about to attack when the director stepped in.

"Now, let's calm down and begin the rehearsals, shall we?"

The kendoist glared at Ranma a few seconds more before he turned around and walked off. As the others moved off to get ready, Akane walked towards Ranma but before she could say anything, he spoke.

"Sorry about that" he said. "I guess I just got tired of him grabbing you all the time."

"Th-that's okay Ranma," she replied.

Happosai's rehearsal took exactly fifteen seconds. He glomped Akane, she sent him through the roof, and the director yelled "Next!"

Hikaru Gosunkugi's took two hours, most of which was occupied by him shouting 'She talked to me!' every time Akane would say a line.

The last two, however, went smoother. Kuno was good, and he knew it. He did most of his lines by memory and was always on cue, but as the director watched them, he knew something was missing.

\*There's no chemistry there--nothing to say that they are a couple.\*

Kuno, of course, thought differently. He smirked at Ranma as he came out of rehearsal.

\*I have this role. Saotome cannot be anything but incompetent.\*

Then it was Ranma's turn.

By this time Akane was rather tired. She didn't think she would be able to do another rehearsal.

Ranma wasn't perfect like Kuno, but as the director coached him along he began to get the feel of the role.

As he improved, Akane's interest returned.

After they recited a few lines, the director backed away and allowed them to continue on their own.

\*That's it,\* he thought. \*If they can do that in front of an audience, we're sure to win.\*

Happosai never showed up for any more rehearsals. Akane hoped that meant he wouldn't show up for the play, either. Gosunkugi...he never did improve. Kuno and Ranma continued to compete hard for the role until, finally, the day of the play arrived.

-----

Ranma quickly stepped out of the bath. He had to hurry if he wanted to get to the school in time to get ready for the play. Throwing on his clothes, Ranma bolted out the bathroom door.

WHACK!

The force of the blow pitched Ranma forward. Before he could regain his balance, he felt a finger poke the back of his neck. Slowly, Ranma's eyes closed and he drifted off to sleep. Just before he completely passed out, he heard his attacker's voice: "Sorry boy, but I'm gonna be the one to kiss Akane!"

"H-happosai..." Ranma muttered as the darkness took him.

Ranma awoke to darkness. When he tried to move, nothing happened. It took him a few minutes to realize that he was encased in something heavy and hard that would barely budge. It was then that he noticed

he was buried. Then he remembered what had happened in the bath.

\*Happosai...\*

He started to struggle as an image of the little pervert ran through his mind.

"Happosai..."

The dirt over and around him shifted slightly while the memory of Happosai trying to get him to wear a bra came back to haunt him. Then he stopped cold as the next vision went through his head.

The vision of Happosai kissing Akane.

"HAPPOSAI!!!!!"

The ground above Ranma erupted with the force of a volcano as he leapt out of the pit he was buried in and landed on its edge.

The young martial artist glanced down just long enough to see that he was encased in concrete and wrapped in chains. It didn't matter, though. All that mattered was him getting to the play and making sure that little creep wish he had never crawled out from under the rock that gave birth to him.

Realizing he was in the back yard of the dojo, Ranma began to hop in the direction of the school.

-----

\*He's not here. Where are you, Ranma?\*

Akane paced back and forth in front of the stage door. A part of her was trying to determine if she was furious because he wasn't there or relieved that she wouldn't have to perform with him.

\*I knew we should have walked together. Something must have happened.\*

She waited a few minutes more, then turned towards the stage door.

\*I'd better go get ready\* she thought.

Before she went inside, Akane cast one look behind her.

"Please hurry, Ranma" she whispered.

-----

Walking down the street, Hiroshi and Daisuke were talking about their favorite subject.

"I tell you that after Akane, Ranma is the prettiest girl in Nerima."

"Perhaps," Hiroshi replied, "but that girl that was chasing Ranma. You know, the one that works at that Chinese restaurant-- Champagne?"

Shalimar? Chanteuse? Anyway, I think she is up there in the beauty department."

"Yeah she is," his friend responded, "but she scares the crap out of me."

He was about to say more when he heard Hiroshi say:

"Now, there's something you don't see every day."

Daisuke followed his friend's gaze until he saw a jumping block of concrete and chains moving quickly down the street.

"Isn't that Ranma's head sticking out of the top?"

"Looks like it to me."

"Oh."

They stared at it for a second more, then started walking again.

"So, why does she scare you?" Hiroshi asked.

-----  
As Akane watched the various performances, her concern for her missing fiancee grew. \*Where is that idiot?\*

While she waited, Akane began to watch the scene being performed on stage. It was from an American drama where a young woman had just learned of the death of her fiancee in a car crash. Akane became totally wrapped up in the scene.

Suddenly, the thought struck her. \*Could Ranma have been hit by a car?\* Her mind conjured up images of a bloody and broken Ranma lying in the street.

Then she shook the image out of her head and replaced it with one of a car wrapped like a horseshoe around a totally unharmed Ranma.

\*That's probably what would happen...\*

Her thoughts were interrupted when a pair of strong arms grabbed her from behind.

"Ranma?!?"

"Nay, fair Akane! Doubtless he truly fears me, for he has not come to meet the challenge. Fate has decreed that I shall be your Romeo!"

Akane twisted out of Kuno's arms and planted a fist in his face.

"What did fate tell you about THAT, upperclassman Kuno?"

"Bit tellb be that u re stiwl wunder the sorwerer's spwell," he replied while holding his nose. Kuno never got the chance to finish

his speech as Akane punted him out of the building. She breathed a sigh of relief, but it was very short-lived.

"Julie-baby!"

Akane held out both hands to ward off Happosai, just as the wall behind him exploded. A cement-encased Ranma came through the hole and squashed the panty thief. The landing caused the cement and chains, weakened by the trip there, to break. They fell down around him, piling at his feet and conveniently on top of Happosai.

Ranma removed himself from the pile and started to brush himself off.

"Ranma!!" Akane shouted. "What happened?"

"The pervert tried to bury me in the backyard of the dojo," he replied, jerking a thumb at the rubble where Happosai was buried, then snorted. "Heh, like that would stop me!"

"You almost didn't make it," Akane said.

"Well," Ranma said, "let's get ready. Meet me outside the dressing rooms when you get done."

"Okay," she replied.

-----

Ranma was late getting to the meeting place.

"What happened?" Akane asked.

"Gos tried to blow me up!"

"Well, come on!" she replied irritably. "We're going to be late!"

By the time they made it backstage it was almost showtime. Unfortunately, when they got into the wings Kuno and Happosai were ready and waiting.

"Remember, Saotome. The last one standing is the true Romeo," Kuno stated flatly. "I shall be that one."

"Julie-baby, it's going to be me!" grinned Happosai, waving a bottle of sake at her.

Akane saw Ranma just smile and then crack his knuckles.

"Akane, You'd better get up to the balcony," he said absently while he glared at the other two Romeos. "I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Ranma?" she said. "You sure?"

"Of course I'm sure! Nobody is going to take this trip from me. Nobody."

Akane was about to protest, but the director grabbed her arm.

"Thirty seconds until curtain!" he yelled. "Come on, Akane, you've got to get in the balcony."

Giving Ranma one last look, she reluctantly obeyed the director.

Once she was gone, Ranma's smile dropped and in a whisper, he said: "Let's do it."

Then the battle was joined.

-----

As the curtain opened, Akane took a deep breath to calm herself.

\*This is it!\* she thought. \*I just hope everything else goes okay.\*

"O, Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo?"

Akane ignored the cheers from the crowd and the director's explanation given over the loudspeakers. Her attention was placed directly on the side entrance. She could see the cloud of dust that had formed around the three Romeos' battle. Oddly enough, she found herself rooting for Ranma.

-----

Ranma jumped up and landed on the railing. He took a quick glance at the tangled heap of Kuno, Gosunkugi, and Hoppo that lay on the stage to make sure that they wouldn't interfere. He then opened his mouth to speak, but the director interrupted.

"The true Romeo has proven himself! He has found his way to his love's side!"

Ranma turned to the director and glared at him.

"Shaddup, willya?"

\*Stupid director\* Ranma thought. \*I ain't her...\*

"Oh Romeo!" said Akane.

The martial artist turned just in time to see the look on Akane's face. Ever since the tryout, he had never truly admitted that she could be cute. He had said it and thought it, but a part of him never believed it. Until that moment. All the doubts he had about her beauty died when he looked into her eyes. Then it hit him. \*She is cute,\* he thought, as he gazed at her. \*The cutest girl I've ever seen.\*

He just stood there in silence taking in her beauty.

Her face was the same as it had always been, but he realized that her eyes were different. They were full of emotion. Not the normal anger that usually occupied them, but joy.

\*I could look at her forever,\* he thought. \*Especially if she keeps looking at me that way.\*

Ranma would have stayed there all night if not for Kuno's yelling out: "HA! I bet the buffoon doesn't even know the lines!!!"

Akane and Ranma smiled at each other. Then Ranma began to recite his lines.

"But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks..."

Starting with those words, Ranma and Akane began their performance. As they continued, the two of them became lost in their respective roles. They did each line with a passion seldom seen anywhere short of the Broadway stage. It was as if they were not Ranma and Akane but Romeo and Juliet reincarnated.

In the audience, two girls whispered to each other.

"It's so real. I don't think they're acting."

Her friend nodded, and whispered "shh!.." Then her full attention went back to the stage.

"Oh, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?" asked Ranma/Romeo.

"What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?" was Akane/Juliet's reply.

They stared at each other in silence. The emotion of their performance filled the theater. Almost every member of the audience was sitting on the edge of their seats, waiting in anticipation for what they knew would happen next.

Then Ranma extended his hand.

"Shake?" he said.

THUMP!!

The both of them were startled by the sound of the entire audience falling out of their seats. As they recovered, a voice screamed out.

"WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOING, SON!?!?"

Ranma and Akane turned to see Soun, dressed in black, jump up to the balcony. Then they noticed that Genma panda was with him.

"YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO KISS HER!!"

"DAD!?!?" Akane yelped out in surprise.

The panda held up a sign saying;

[Yeah! So get with it boy!]

"No!" Ranma replied defiantly. "I won't kiss her!"

"Why not!," Soun replied. "The families are in agreement!"

Ranma glared at Akane's father.

"I'm not kissing her," he said in a tone of voice that spoke volumes about his resolve.

Then Ranma heard laughter from the stage. Kuno, Happosai, and Gosunkugi were all beneath the balcony.

"If Romeo cannot kiss Juliet, he needs to be replaced."

Ranma immediately leaped over the railing and attacked Kuno. Happosai took the opportunity to jump onto the balcony, but Akane kicked him through the roof, and he sailed away into the evening air.

-----

Akane watched as the two fought.

\*With Happi gone, it's down to Ranma and Kuno\* she thought. While a small part of her was rooting for Ranma, the rest wasn't happy with either choice.

"Like that is much of a choice!" she whispered. "That's it, I'm not kissing either one of those idiots!"

Just as she stepped forward to tell them her decision, her foot bumped into something. She looked down and noticed a roll of duct tape on the floor. The idea struck her immediately.

\*Of course!\* she thought as she bent down and picked up the tape.  
\*I'll put tape over the winner's mouth and kiss it!\* She stood up and tore a small piece of the roll, then stuck it on her sleeve.

"Perfect," she whispered and smiled evilly. Unfortunately, she was so involved with her plan, she didn't notice the figure sneaking up behind her.

-----

\*What an opportunity\* thought Gos. He crept onto the balcony and up behind Akane. She was watching the battle intently, and didn't notice when he shoved a cloth soaked with chloroform over her nose and mouth.

Ranma chose that moment to look up. He saw Akane collapse.

"Hey!"

"An opening!" Kuno used Ranma's distraction to land a blow.

"I don't have TIME for this!"

Ranma's next blow sent Kuno flying into the audience. Students scattered as he landed in the seats. Ranma leapt onto the balcony. As he advanced, Gosunkugi pulled a backscratcher out of his pocket and put it to Akane's throat.

"Come a step closer and Juliet dies!"

Gosunkugi realized he had made a mistake when Ranma just appeared in front of him.

\*I...I never saw him move!\*

Before Gos could react, the backscratcher was plucked out of his hand.

"Put her down! Now!" Ranma hissed. Gos immediately complied. As soon as Akane was on the floor, Ranma grabbed Gos by the collar and lifted him off the ground.

"The only reason you are still breathing is because I don't beat on people who can't defend themselves," Ranma said in a voice low enough for only Gos to hear, "but if you ever threaten her life again, You. Will. Hurt. Clear?"

The expression on Gos' face told Ranma that he understood.

"Now get out of my sight." Ranma let go of his would-be rival, and watched him stagger off the stage.

\*Well\* Ranma thought, \*at least he didn't wet himself.\*

With that done, he turned his attention to Akane. He carefully lifted Akane into his arms and descended from the balcony.

"Hey, wake up!" he said. "We still have a play to finish!"

But as the curtain descended, she didn't move at all.

-----

Ranma knelt on the floor, fanning an unconscious Akane.

\*Why won't she wake up?\*

He suddenly found himself shoved out of the way as a couple of stagehands dragged a coffin on stage.

"What the HECK are you doing?" he yelled out as they placed Akane in the coffin.

The voice of the director came from the wings.

"We have to work with this, Ranma. As long as Akane is out cold, we can throw some Sleeping Beauty into this. You kiss her to wake her up."

Ranma froze.

"I WHAT?!?"

Before the director could say another word, Ranma grabbed his shirt.

"What is it with all this kissing?"

The director pointed to his side. "It was his idea."

A short, round man stood in the wings, but he wasn't alone. Genma stood on one side of him, and Soun on the other, both grinning widely.

"Yeah," Ranma muttered, "and I wonder WHO gave him the idea."

"You no kiss girl," the judge yelled out. "You no win contest!"

Before Ranma could object, the curtain opened, and the director grabbed the mike.

"Juliet sleeps...only the kiss of her true love can awaken her."

Ranma stood by the coffin and stared down at Akane.

\*Damn,\* he thought as he knelt down. \*Do I really want to win like this?\*

"Go on, kiss her!!" he heard his father's voice call out.

Ranma looked at Akane's serene, sleeping face. He tried to move closer but found that he couldn't do it.

\*I..I can't do it\* he thought. \*Not to win a contest. I'm...\*

His thought was interrupted by Soun's voice.

"DO YOU HATE MY DAUGHTER THAT MUCH?"

"Damn it! If I didn't care, this wouldn't be so HARD!" he replied immediately.

Ranma nearly jumped out of his skin when Akane tugged on his pigtail.

"A-Akane?" he whispered. "How long have you been awake?"

"Long enough. Just think about China, Ranma, and you can do it. I'll make it easy for you."

He watched her close her eyes and pucker her lips. A part of him wanted to deny everything he said. To insult her and get pummeled. But he just knelt there, his face a mask of confusion.

Then Akane opened her eyes and saw his hesitation. He saw as a look of sadness crossed her face.

"Can't you just pretend?"

For Ranma, it was as if he had been slapped.

\*Pretend. That's what I've been doing all this time\* he thought as he gazed at Akane. Pretending not to care about her. Pretending he didn't like her. Pretending that...she wasn't cute. It was at that

point that Ranma realized that he couldn't pretend anymore.

"No, I can't.." Ranma whispered as he leaned towards her lips. "Not anymore."

-----

Akane watched the confusion play on Ranma's face.

\*Ha! It's working perfectly! Now I'll just put the tape over his mouth and kiss him!\* she thought. \*Let's see how that idiot like that!\*

As she began to lift her hands though, she noticed that his expression had changed. The confusion was gone and had been replaced with what looked like a mix of enlightenment, determination and...affection? Suddenly Akane's heart started to pound in her chest. The only coherent thought before his lips met hers was:

\*WHAT?!?\*

Next chapter: The aftermath.

Comments welcome! (David "Fido" Lindquist [fido@rma.edu] and June "KaraOhki" Geraci [karaohki@snet.net])

### 3. Default Chapter Title

A Kiss to the Victor

December 9, 1999

Revised December 15, 1999

A Ranma 1/2 fanfic by Hound & Cabbit Productions (David "Fido" Lindquist [fido@rma.edu] and June "KaraOhki" Geraci [karaohki@snet.net])

Ranma 1/2 was created by Rumiko Takahashi. We're just borrowing her characters for a little while.

Earlier chapters can be read at

<http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/rothko/228>

### Chapter Three

The kiss had a lot going against it. First, in was in front of an audience. Second, Ranma had NO idea how to kiss a girl. Finally, Akane's breath still smelled like chloroform, but to Ranma, it didn't matter. To him, it was...nice. Very nice and VERY memorable. A small part of him couldn't believe that he didn't remember the kiss he'd given her while in Neko-ken.

-----

As Ranma's lips touched hers, Akane almost pushed him away. Then she

realized that she didn't want to. How many times had she wondered what it would feel like to have Ranma kiss her? The Neko-ken kiss didn't count--he didn't even remember it--but this one did. She was about to reach up to embrace him when she realized that they were kissing in front of an audience.

Over the cheering crowd, Akane thought she could hear her father yelling "The houses will soon be wed!"

\*OH NO!\* she thought. \*What will we...\* Then she remembered the tape. As he pulled away from her, Akane quickly slapped it over Ranma's mouth.

He looked confused, and she could have sworn, hurt.

"Ranma, please," she whispered, pleading with her eyes. "Trust me."

As the curtain closed, they could still hear the crowd cheering wildly.

Ranma, the tape still over his mouth, extended his hand and helped Akane out of the coffin.

Then they were nearly knocked down when their fathers charged them.

"Wonderful! It's about..."

They both stopped when they noticed the tape over Ranma's mouth.

"Boy," Genma said. "Why do you have tape over your mouth?"

"Mmmph," said Ranma.

"Of course he has tape over his mouth!" Akane said matter-of-factly. "Whatever gave you the idea that I'd let him kiss me?"

Soun's face fell, and he started to cry.

"WAAH! NOW THE FAMILIES WON'T BE JOINED!"

Ranma tore the tape off his mouth, winced, then yelled: "Would you two give it a REST, already!" He then started to stomp off the stage.

"W...where are you going?" Genma asked.

"To change and get out of here!" he replied.

As he stormed off, the director walked up to him.

"We won!" he said happily.

"Whoopie," Ranma replied, his voice dripping with anger. Without another word, Ranma left the stage, leaving behind a very confused Akane.

-----

Akane gathered her things, and opened the door of her dressing room.

She jumped when she saw Ranma standing there.

"Ranma," she whispered.

"I've been waiting for you, Akane."

"Why?"

"Let's get going."

Ranma was quiet until they left the school grounds behind them, and had reached the path by the canal. Then he stopped walking, and put down his bag. Akane put her bag beside his, and waited for him to speak.

Ranma held out his hand, and Akane could see that he was holding the tape she'd put over his mouth. All he said was: "Why?"

Akane's reply wasn't what he expected.

"Do you want to get married?"

"WHAT!?" he yelled out in surprise. "Of course not! It would be a disaster! Shampoo and Kodachi would be trying to kill you. Cologne and Kuno would be coming after me! And I don't even want to THINK what getting Tofu and Kasumi in the same room for a wedding ceremony would be like! Besides, we're too young!"

"What do you think our fathers would have done if they knew we HAD kissed?"

Ranma thought for a second, then let out a sigh.

"They'd have had the wedding ready by the time we got out of the theater."

Ranma was quiet for a few seconds, and then he smiled at Akane.

"Good thinking. Thanks."

They said nothing for a few minutes as they walked along. Ranma had jumped on top of the fence and kept pace with Akane. Then Akane broke the silence.

"Ranma?"

"Yeah?" he replied.

"What did you mean by 'No I can't...not any more.' "

He stopped for a moment to gather his thoughts, then turned to her.

"I can't pretend that I...I..."

"Like me?" Akane finished his sentence. She had completely misunderstood him.

"No! I can't pretend that I don't like you, because I do!"

Akane just stared. She couldn't speak for a full minute.

"You l-like me?"

"Yeah."

"Then why did make a big production about not wanting to kiss me?" she responded.

Ranma almost threw an insult at her but caught himself. He stopped and looked down at her.

"Because," the martial artist said. "I didn't want our first kiss to be like that! Just some way to win a contest!" Akane started to say something but Ranma cut her off. "I wanted it to be special. That's all."

Ranma shoved his hands in his pockets, slumped his shoulders and resumed walking.

Akane stood there, a look of shock on her face. Then it changed to a small smile. She turned and caught up with him, making sure to keep pace.

"You know what," she said simply, "This kiss doesn't count either."

TRIP...SPLASH!

Akane turned just in time to see Ranma fall off the fence. She ran to it, concerned.

"Ranma?!?"

"That," a wet, female Ranma replied as she sat in the canal, "was sooo uncute!"

Akane couldn't help but giggle. By the time she recovered, Ranma had already jumped back over the fence. Akane was still smiling, whereas Ranma looked like a drowned cat. A few seconds later, Ranma broke the silence.

"That wasn't funny, you know."

"I'm sorry, Ranma," Akane replied. "I couldn't help it."

"Okay, now what did you mean that this kiss didn't count either?"

"Well, it was part of the play, right?"

Ranma nodded her head in agreement.

"If an actor and actress kiss on stage it's part of their performance," Akane continued, as she watched the comprehension dawn

on her fiance's face.

"So that kiss didn't count!" Ranma said, finishing Akane's sentence.

Akane watched as Ranma's face transformed from irritation to relief, then to joy.

"All right!" Ranma said.

Akane couldn't help but start to giggle again, but then stopped suddenly.

"Ranma?"

Ranma was still smiling when she replied. "Yeah?"

"Does that mean you WANT to kiss me for real?"

Ranma's smile vanished instantly. It was immediately replaced with a sick and confused look.

"Not right now! Jeeze, we're both girls!" she blurted out. Then Ranma mumbled, "and you call ME a pervert!"

Akane almost swung at the martial artist but stopped.

"I don't mean that!" she said, a note of anger in her voice. "I mean when you're a guy again."

Ranma looked into Akane's eyes, even though she had to look up to do it. She bit her lip as if trying to decide something. A few seconds later, a look washed over her face. The same look she had at the play, just before he'd kissed her.

Ranma opened her mouth to speak, and was interrupted by a voice from behind.

"Juliet-baby! I'm ready for my kiss!"

They both turned to see Happosai bounding towards them, his lips in a pucker.

"THE PLAY IS OVER, YOU PERVERT!!" Akane yelled out.

"I know!" he replied. "I just want to practice for next year!"

He never saw the fists that launched him towards the sky.

Ranma and Akane both rubbed their knuckles.

"Man," Ranma said. "His head must be getting harder."

"Yeah," Akane replied.

They looked at each other again, but it was too late. Whatever Ranma would have said was gone now. The moment had passed.

"Let's go home," Akane said.

Ranma just nodded, then the two headed down the street.

-----

They could hear the noise coming from the house before it was in sight.

"Are they having a party or something?" Akane asked.

"Sounds like it," replied Ranma.

Hands grabbed them as they opened the door.

Ranma was pulled aside by his father, who dumped a kettle of hot water over him.

"I expected you'd come home in this condition. We have to get you upstairs and changed."

At the same time, Soun and Kasumi were pulling Akane toward the stairs.

"You have to get changed, Akane!"

Ranma and Akane planted their feet and yelled at their families in unison: "What the heck is going on here?"

Their question was answered by the appearance of a priest in the room.

"Is this the young couple who are going to be married?"

"M-MARRIED??!!"

As Ranma shouted, he pulled himself free from his father's grasp. Akane had escaped from Kasumi and Soun's hold. They stood close together, staring at the family group in front of them. It was at that point that they realized that all of the members of the Drama Club were there, standing with the little round man Ranma had seen backstage.

"You kissed girl, you won prize! Now you see China!"

For a moment, the threat of a wedding was forgotten. All Ranma could concentrate on was that trip.

"Yes, when do we leave?"

The man looked confused. "Leave? You seeing China now!"

"Whaaat?" Ranma leaped forward, fists clenched. "You wanna explain that?"

Soun jumped between them. "It seems we were mistaken, Son. The prize wasn't a trip to China like we thought, but a chance to meet Mr. Li here." "Please, call me China," the actor said.

Ranma sagged. He and Akane had gone through hell for nothing. Then

his father walked up and slapped him on the back.

"Too bad about the trip, boy. When we found out about the mix-up, we decided to reward the both of you with this wedding!"

"Then why did you have me booked a week in advance?" the priest asked.

"Um..." the elder Saotome replied, as a large sweatdrop formed at the back of his head.

"That's not important right now," Soun added, grabbing his daughter's arm. Genma took advantage of the confusion in the room to grab Ranma's arm again.

"Right," Genma added. "Let's go!"

The both of them walked forward but were suddenly stopped when their children didn't move. The two also felt something else.

"Is your hand getting warm, Saotome?" Soun asked his future in law.

"Yes," he replied. "As a matter of fact, it is."

They simultaneously decided it might be wise to find out what the source of the heat was.

Turning around, they both were stunned to see their children glowing. On top of that, their heads began to grow at the same time. "ARE YOU NUTS? the enlarged head of Ranma yelled.

"WE ARE NOT GETTING MARRIED!!" shouted Akane.

None of them noticed that the priest had fainted, clutching his prayer book against him. The four of them had other concerns at the moment. Ranma and Akane with convincing their fathers to call off the wedding; Soun and Genma merely trying to survive their effort with at least some dignity intact.

However, this was the first time they had ever been exposed to their children's version of the 'Demon Head Attack.' Add that to the fact that neither one of them was very brave to begin with. The result was predictable.

"Waaah!" yelled Soun. "I'm sorrrry!"

Genma folded once his friend's support had been removed. "I guess...I guess we could put this off for a little while."

"A LITTLE?????" their children both roared, their battle auras flaring at the same time.

At those words, Soun and Genma reverted to their basic line of defense. Soun fainted, while Genma went into 'cute panda' mode.

Kasumi stepped forward and spoke to the guests.

"I'm sorry. The party appears to be over."

The guests looked at her, at each other, and shrugged their shoulders.

"I should have known this wouldn't work," said Hiroshi.

"That's not what you said when we were on our way here," replied Daisuke.

One by one, the guests left. The priest recovered consciousness and followed them out. As he passed Kasumi, she heard him mumbling a prayer.

The silence in the house after all the guests were gone was rather unnerving. Kasumi got some trash bags, and began to clean up the mess. Ranma gave his father one more dirty look and joined her, followed by Akane. Soun and Genma, after they recovered, retreated to their shogi board. Nabiki went upstairs, covered her bedroom window, and took out what she needed to begin developing the pictures she took at the play. She hadn't quite finished when Kasumi called her down to dinner, where everyone stared at each other while they ate.

Akane finished her meal rather quickly, then stood and looked at her father.

"I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

Soun looked as though he wanted to say something to Akane, but her expression prevented him from opening his mouth.

Shortly after Akane departed, Ranma excused himself and went upstairs. Kasumi looked at him with concern: Ranma appeared tired and somewhat depressed.

As soon as Ranma closed his door, he made a beeline for the window. Even though he was exhausted, there was too much he had to work out in his mind. Way too much.

Hopping out, he quickly climbed to the roof.

\*This,\* he thought, as he sat down, \*has to be the worst night of my life.\*

\*No trip to China. No cure. I've been ambushed, buried, tied up, insulted, drowned, almost blown up and came very close to getting married.\*

He instinctively made a fist in response to the next part.

\*And every bit of it was for nothing.\*

Ranma then smiled. \*Well, almost nothing,\* he thought, while images of his kiss with Akane ran through his head. It was still good, even if it didn't count.

Sitting quietly for a few minutes, Ranma then turned his thoughts to their walk home and how it ended.

"Does that mean you want to kiss me for real?" he remembered Akane

asking.

If they hadn't been interrupted, he would have given her his answer.

"Yes," he found himself replying then, sighed.

\*and I just missed my chance to tell her...again. This ALWAYS happens to us. Every time we start to get close, I chicken out, or somebody gets in the way.\*

A phrase came to Ranma's mind--"He who hesitates is lost."

Ranma couldn't believe it when that saying popped into his head. It was a piece of advice his father had given him and to his surprise, it actually made sense. Perfect sense.

Ranma cast a glance at Akane's window.

\*Her light's still on,\* he thought. \*No time like right now, I guess.\*

He then got up and made his way to her window.

-----

Akane sat at her desk, trying to read. She'd gone to bed, but had been unable to even close her eyes, and had given it up as a waste of effort.

She hadn't read more than a page or two when she was startled by the sound of rapping on her window. When she looked up, Ranma was hanging upside down from the gutter. Akane put down her book and slid the window open.

"What are you doing here?"

"I need to talk to you, Akane. May I come in?"

"Okay."

She moved away from the desk, and allowed Ranma to climb in.

Once Ranma got inside, he was assailed by a wave of nervousness. Unable to even look at Akane, he hung his head and twiddled his fingers.

Akane looked thoroughly confused. Then Ranma raised his eyes to hers with a look of determination that almost frightened her.

"I never got to answer that question you asked me."

Akane couldn't say a word. She wasn't sure if she WANTED Ranma to answer her.

Before she could say anything, Ranma continued. "I do want to kiss you. You're the only girl I've ever wanted to kiss."

Ranma placed his hand under Akane's chin and tilted her head upwards so quickly that Akane didn't have time react. He moved in close to

her mouth, then stopped. For a second, it looked like he was going to back away. Then Ranma slowly brushed his lips against Akane's.

Any doubts Ranma may have had crumbled. He had no idea when his arms went around Akane, or hers around him. All he did know was that it felt wonderful.

-----

\*What is he doing?\* Akane thought as Ranma's lips met hers. \*He's--\* Then she realized what was happening. \*Our first kiss. Our first REAL kiss! And I like it\* Instinctively, Akane wrapped her arms around Ranma and returned the kiss. She felt a tear run down her cheek.

The faint sound of footsteps in the hallway made them pull apart. Akane saw the look of contentment on Ranma's face, and couldn't ignore the warm feeling inside of her. She started to smile, but stopped when she saw his face change.

Ranma put his hand to Akane's cheek, and wiped away the tear.

"A-Akane? Oh man! I-I'm sorry! I didn't mean to hurt you!"

\*Hurt me?\* she thought. Then she remembered the tears on her face.

"I-I'll leave you alone," he said as he started to go to the window.

"No! Don't go!" she almost shouted, then grabbed his arm. "You didn't hurt me, Ranma."

"Then why-?"

"I-I don't know," she replied, looking terribly unsure. "I'm just so confused."

Ranma reached out and caressed Akane's cheek. He left his hand there, and for a moment she thought he would kiss her again. Then he withdrew it, leaving Akane feeling slightly disappointed.

"So was I," he said. "Good night, Akane."

After that he turned around and opened the window, but before he climbed out he looked back at her, smiled then spoke.

"Oh, by the way...that one counted."

As her fiance left, Akane sank down onto her bed, her hand to her lips.

\*Yes,\* she thought. \*I guess it did.\*

-----

"These are nice," Nabiki said as she removed the last picture from the developing fluid. "And this one looks..."

The middle Tendo daughter stopped when she examined it more closely.

\*No way!\* she thought, still staring at it. Then an evil smile spread across her lips.

"This," she said, "was worth the cost of the telephoto lens."

Taking great care, Nabiki clipped it up to the line with the other pictures then cleaned her hands. Once she was finished, Nabiki started to walk to the door. As she left her room, Nabiki looked at the photo and smirked. \*Nice kiss,\* she thought, \*and no tape on Ranma's mouth.\* Then she smiled. \*I'm gonna make some real money off of this! I can feel it! Maybe I should make some phone calls and get the bidding started\*

-----

Ranma quietly crept into his bedroom window. The one thing he didn't want to do is disturb his father, who was asleep on the futon and snoring loudly. It wasn't respect for his father that made Ranma cautious, but fear that he would let slip what had happened between him and Akane.

The martial artist couldn't help but smile as he replayed the kiss in his mind. It had been almost perfect. Except for what happened afterwards. Ranma nearly broke down when he saw Akane crying. He was so sure that he'd hurt her, but Akane's reactions said otherwise.

The thing that had convinced him that Akane was sincere was the way she stood. No quivering rage. No tensing to attack. Not even a hint of danger coming from her. Just confusion and...desire?

Ranma had never attempted to use his skills to figure out something like that. Then again, he had never wanted or needed to use them like that either.

Ranma walked over to his futon, undressed rapidly, and lay down.

\*Maybe if I had used them that way,\* he thought as he stared at the ceiling, \*I wouldn't have Kodachi and Shampoo chasing me.\*

Ranma frowned slightly at the thought of the other two women who wanted him. If things went the way he wanted them to, neither one of them were going to be happy. He also knew that if the past was any indication, neither of them would hesitate to attempt to "remove" their competition--Akane. A hint of fear crept into him at the thought of Akane being hurt. The fear turned to anger. Nobody hurt HIS girl.

He was so surprised at the thought that he sat up. \*My girl? MY girl? Damn straight she's mine!\*

Ranma lay down again and settled himself beneath the quilt. For the first time in months he felt no confusion or doubt. He knew what he wanted. Now he had to figure out what to do about it.

-----  
\*Our first kiss,\* Akane thought as she lay in bed. She still felt the warmth from it, despite the fact that it had happened a few hours ago. However, the kiss had brought up a problem her mind was having a very hard time sorting out.

\*But how do I feel about him?\*

Letting out a sigh, she got out of bed and began to pace around the room. Casting a glance at her desk, she thought about writing down what happened in her diary. She immediately dismissed it as being too dangerous. While Akane had gone to great lengths to keep her diary a secret, she suspected that Nabiki knew about it.

\*And if my sister were to ever find out about this...\* She shivered, and hugged herself.

\*Why can't I figure this out?! \* Akane thought as she resumed pacing the floor .\* He's always insulting me, makes fun of my cooking, constantly flirting with other girls...but that kiss.\*

Akane stopped in front of her bed and sat down.

\*No, it's more than that. It's the way he acted tonight. Also, what he said to me--that I'm the only girl he ever wanted to kiss...\*

Akane wiped a tear from her eye.

\*Did he really mean it?\*

Then she remembered what Ranma had done at the first rehearsal.

\*He told Kuno not to touch me...but he refused to let Kuno tell him that he couldn't. Was he thinking about kissing me back then? Or was this all part of a big plan so that he could steal a kiss from me?\*

\*That's it! All of this was just some perverted plan of his to kiss me!\* Akane's anger began to build but it just as quickly left at her next thought. \*Then why did he say he liked me after the play?\*

She stifled a yawn then shook her head.

\*And if he is telling the truth...\* she asked herself, just before she lay down and closed her eyes, \*how do I feel about him?\*

-----  
Akane slept poorly that night. It also didn't straighten out any of the confusion she felt over Ranma. The only thing she was able to figure out however, was how to treat him.

\*I'm going to treat Ranma the same as I ever have,\* she thought.  
\*Except that I'll try not to hit him if he does something stupid.\*

With that settled in her mind, she went downstairs to breakfast. Ranma was already eating, and she sat down beside him.

All of Akane's good intentions were swept away when Ranma grabbed her hand under the table and squeezed it. She almost shouted in surprise but was able to hold it in--barely.

\*Has he gone nuts?\* she thought, casting a quick glance at everyone else at the table. \*What if one of them saw?\*

Then she felt him let go of her hand. Akane took a quick glance at her fiance. He wasn't even looking at her.

"Akane?"

Kasumi's voice was like a bolt of lightning to Akane. She immediately jumped up, causing the table to shift around and most of the food to spill.

"Hey! My clothes!" Nabiki shouted. "They're ruined!"

Akane looked over at her sister. "I-I'm sorry, Nabiki!" she stammered. "Kasumi startled me."

Everyone at the table stared at her in disbelief, causing Akane to blush at the unwanted attention.

"Well, she did!"

"Akane," Soun said, "are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right! There's nothing wrong with me! Nothing at all! Nope, I'm fine!"

"Then why are you rambling on?" Nabiki asked as she tried to wipe some of the mess off her school uniform.

"I AM NOT RAMBLING!" she shouted.

"Sure you're not."

Akane glared at her sister, then started to eat her breakfast.

\*This is all Ranma's fault.\*

However, even though it was, a small part of her didn't mind.

Ranma kept his hands to himself as Akane quickly finished her breakfast. However, she felt him staring at her. She steadfastly refused to meet his eyes, afraid of what her reaction would be. Nabiki hadn't even come back downstairs when she left for school. She was almost out the door when she heard Ranma shout "Hey! wait up!"

Akane couldn't keep from blushing slightly at the sound of his voice. A part of her wanted to run away as fast as she could. She also wanted to wait. The part of her that wanted to wait won.

"You weren't thinking of leaving without me, were you?" asked Ranma.

Akane couldn't think of an answer.

"We almost always walk to school together! What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?! You scared me half to death with that stunt in there! What if our fathers had seen it?"

"Stunt?" Ranma replied, his face a mask of confusion.

"You squeezed my hand!"

"So? You looked like you could use it," he said.

Akane was able to fight off the urge to throw her arms around him for being concerned about her.

"W-well give me some warning next time!"

"How am I supposed to do that? I can't tell you in front of everybody that I'm gonna squeeze your hand!"

"Umm...but...ahhh. OHHH! YOU IDIOT!"

Akane then turned and stalked off toward school.

\*Man, Pop was right,\* Ranma thought as he watched her go. \*There's no way to figure out women!\*

-----

\*I can't believe I'm going to be late because of those two,\* thought Nabiki as she checked herself in the mirror. \*What could have gotten into them? My sister klutzes out and Ranma doesn't even breathe hard!\*

Nabiki put the thought aside as she grabbed her books and took off for school as fast as she could run. This problem needed some investigation--later. Later came more quickly than she expected when Nabiki rounded a corner and nearly knocked Hikaru Gosunkugi off his feet.

"Sorry! I didn't see you."

Gosunkuji just shrugged his shoulders. He looked a little more depressed than usual. Nabiki started to walk away, but something made her turn around.

"Are you all right?"

"No."

He looked at the ground for a moment, and then directly at Nabiki.

"You really want to know?"

"Not real--" Nabiki started to reply, but he cut her off.

"M-my Akane is gone!"

\*He's delusional,\* Nabiki thought. \*HIS Akane?\*

"Damn that Saotome! He has won her heart!"

\*Whoa,\* she thought. \*What in the world would make him think that?\*

"Do you have any proof of this?"

"I...I was THERE! At the rehearsals! Ranma hit Kuno for hugging Akane, then said what he and his fiancee do is their business!"

"He WHAT?"

Gos jumped like a scared rabbit, then began to cower.

"H-honest! He did s-say it!" Gosunkuji then gulped. "Please don't hurt me!" However, by the time he looked back up at Nabiki she was already walking down the sidewalk.

Nabiki was analyzing this new piece of information. Ranma was actually calling Akane his fiancee--something quite rare for him. He normally referred to her as "the tomboy", or something equally insulting. Nabiki sighed in frustration.

\*The photo isn't enough. I need more evidence if I'm going to make a profit out of this.\*

As Nabiki continued to walk, her thoughts kept going to the photograph in her purse. A part of her was glad she held off telling anyone about it. But that meant she would have to keep the picture under wraps for now.

\*Why would he say that?\* she thought, \*Was he just jerking Kuno-baby's chain or was it the truth?\*

She pondered that question for a while, then smiled.

"I may not know what's going on yet, but I will!"

-----

Akane wanted some peace and quiet so badly that she considered leaving school. She needed to think, and thinking was impossible with all of her friends bothering her. It was even worse than it had been before the play.

"Oh Akane! He kissed you! Tell me what it was like!"

"I told you it would be romantic if Ranma got the role. Why wouldn't you believe me?" Those remarks and other similar ones had Akane close to the screaming point.

The only good thing about it was that Ranma seemed to be getting the same treatment from his friends.

Finally, Akane decided she'd had enough.

"What goes on between Ranma and me is none of your business! Don't you have anything better to do?"

The whole room fell silent as Akane's friends backed away. They didn't expect this kind of reaction from her.

Unfortunately, she'd said it a little too loudly. \*Oh no!\* Akane was about to explain what she meant when she saw Ranma staring at her from the other end of the room. It was impossible for her to miss the look in his eyes. The same look of affection he gave her at the play.

\*Don't look at me like that!\* she thought, trying desperately to gain control of her emotions. \*Darn it! I can't think clearly when you look at me like that!\*

"AKANE TENDO!"

Silently thankful for the distraction, Akane, along with everyone else, turned to the source of the shout. Standing on the windowsill was a woman. Her face and body was shrouded in a black cloak.

"How dare you kiss my beloved Ranma's lips!"

"YOUR RANMA?!?!" Akane yelled back. The confusion she felt was instantly replaced by a growing anger. \*How dare she say that! He likes me!!\*

The woman ignored her then threw off the cloak. It fell to the ground along with a bunch of black rose petals. Kodachi Kuno, now in her usual leotard, glared at Akane.

"My poor Ranma. It must have been horrible having to kiss a lowly peasant such as you!"

Anger erupted within Akane. \*How dare she call me that!\* She was about to attack Kodachi when an idea popped into her head. A very nasty idea.

\*\*\*\*\*

The other students could see her visibly shaking with rage. Most of them were already edging their way out of the battle zone when they saw Akane stop and seem to relax. Strangely enough, she was smiling. Even more strange was what she said.

"He didn't seem to think so."

Almost all the students looked at the now uncomfortable Ranma. He was about to say something when they all heard Kodachi scream.

"DIE, HARLOT!" She leapt into the air and drew out her ribbon. The gymnast snapped the end out and aimed it directly for Akane's face. Akane easily dodged the attack and began to move towards her opponent.

Akane dodged Kodachi's ribbon and moved forward while continuing to avoid her opponent's attacks. The other students had already moved out of the battlefield at the first sign of trouble, something Akane was very grateful for.

The teacher was already long gone. He'd learned the hard way not to get himself involved in the fights that broke out in the classroom. Besides, he'd just gotten the cast off his leg. As the fight waged on, Akane noticed something. \*Her attacks are sloppier than usual.\* Kodachi's expression told her why. \*I've never seen anyone look so mad!\*

Then Akane spotted the opening she wanted. \*Time to end this.\*

Kodachi screamed as Akane dodged another ribbon strike. \*How DARE the little tramp say that!\*

Leaping into the air, the head of the St. Hebereke gymnastics team lashed out aiming for her opponent's head. \*Well, let's see how smart mouthed she is when I cut that face of hers!\* she thought.

The ribbon's aim was perfect. It hit exactly at the spot it was supposed to. The problem was that the target wasn't there. Kodachi realized she had another problem when she saw that Akane was holding the end of the ribbon. Akane smiled evilly as she yanked downward.

"Whaa..OOF?!?" was all Kodachi could say as she was pulled from her planned trajectory and sailed right into a fist in the stomach. She doubled over onto the floor, trying desperately to get her breath back. By the time she did, however, Kodachi had been tied up by her own ribbon.

The gymnast looked up to glare at Akane only to see Akane glaring at her.

"Now, I want to make something clear!" Akane said. "I didn't kiss Ranma! I put some tape on his mouth and kissed that! And as for you..."

Kodachi saw her rival move towards her.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking out the trash!" Akane replied.

Before the gymnast could say anything more, Akane continued. "Oh, and one more thing... RANMA ISN'T YOURS!"

In one motion, Akane picked up her opponent and punted her out the window. As Akane watched Kodachi sail over the horizon, she couldn't help but feel good.

Then she realized what she'd just said.

\*Oh no! What did I just SAY? What is everybody going to think?\*

Akane had just begun to think of possible answers to that question when the bell rang for lunch. She grabbed her bento and ran.

-----

Ranma was amazed at what Akane said. \*That's the first time she ever made a remark like that!\* he thought. \*Did she really mean it?\*

It was then that he realized something else. The way that she fought Kodachi wasn't normal for her. It was very familiar, though.

\*She fought her the way she fights with me!\*

He'd never seen her do that before and it was rather strange.

"Ranma?" "Huh?" he replied.

Hiroshi looked at him curiously.

"The lunch bell just rang. Didn't you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"The lunch bell!" Hiroshi deadpanned. "Jeeze, you act like you'd never seen two women fighting over you before!"

"Akane was fighting for me, wasn't she?"

"Sure looked like it," Ranma's friend replied. "Well, I'm going to lunch. You comin'?"

\*She fought for me,\* Ranma thought. He was nearly in a state of shock.

\*Does that mean she cares?\* He didn't hear Hiroshi sigh then leave. At that instant, he wouldn't have heard a 21 gun salute. Ranma just sat down at his desk, took out his bento and sat there munching, his face thoughtful.

\*She fought for me. She didn't fight WITH me-- she fought FOR me! And she didn't blame me for it afterwards.\*

-----

Kodachi finally reached the apex of her flight, and began to descend.

"I can't believe that Akane Tendo defeated me! I am a Kuno! This is not to be borne!"

Then she realized where she was about to land.

SPLASH!!!

Kodachi pulled herself out of the St. Hebereke swimming pool. Several of her classmates were standing there.

Kodachi was so furious that she didn't even notice their presence. Instead, she continued ranting. "Akane Tendo will pay dearly for this!" Her classmates merely shrugged their shoulders and walked away. To them, this was business as usual at St. Hebereke's.

-----  
It took Akane a few minutes to calm down. She had run all the way from the classroom to a tree that sat near the school boundary. When she got there, it took every once of willpower she had not to keep running.

\*How can I face them all after what I said?\* she thought, \*and why did I say it?\*

She began to pace in front of the tree.

\*I can't like that idiot! I mean, how could I ever trust him when he has all those women groping at him?\*

The thought hit her hard. \*They were groping him. That's not right, is it?\*

Her mind began to run through all the times she had caught Ranma with other women. In every case, Ranma had never been the one doing the grabbing--whether the girl in question was Shampoo, Kodachi, or someone else. They had all grabbed HIM.

Then, Akane heard Ranma's voice in her head, speaking words she'd heard hundreds of times before and ignored.

"Would you get offa me? Let go!"

\*Why was I blaming him?\* she wondered.

Akane caught a small movement out of the corner of her eye. Spinning around, she immediately assumed a combat stance.

"EEK! Don't hit me!" Yuka cried out.

"Yuka?!" Akane shouted. "What are you doing sneaking up on me like that?"

"I wasn't sneaking!" her classmate replied. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay. "Kodachi really got you upset, and I was worried."

The youngest Tendo daughter's emotions seem to drain out of her at Yuka's words. She slumped against the tree as her friend looked on; however, she waved Yuka off when she tried to help her.

I'm all right," she lied. "Just a little tired."

Yuka nodded. "You look tired. Are you having trouble sleeping or something?"

"Um, yeah," replied Akane.

"Why? Did Ranma dump you?"

"NO!" Akane blurted out instantly.

Yuka stepped back at the force of her voice.

"Well if he didn't, then..." Yuka's eyes widened and she drew in a

sharp breath. "Akane, just how far did you let him go?"

"No! It's not like that! He just kissed me in my bedroom!"

Akane slapped her hand over her mouth but there was no way to take the words back. She stifled a sob and slid down the trunk of the tree until she was sitting with her back against it, then hid her face with her hands. Yuka sat down beside her and took her hand.

"What was Ranma doing in your bedroom? Did he hurt you?"

Akane pulled herself together. She shook her head violently and took in a couple of deep breaths.

"Let me start from the beginning."

Akane began to talk about everything that had happened since the first day Ranma had arrived in Nerima. All of it. His curse. How they met. She left nothing out. It flowed out of her like a torrent. As Akane continued to talk, it felt as though a weight was being lifted off her heart.

Yuka was overwhelmed. Akane was throwing so much information at her. Then Akane stopped to catch her breath, and Yuka couldn't help but stare at her. \*She's been through more than any of us knew. Poor Akane!\*

Yuka was trying to think of something to say when Akane suddenly started talking again.

"On the way home from the play we agreed that the kiss on stage wasn't real because it was part of the play. I figured that was the end of it, but then Ranma came to my window and asked to talk to me."

Akane paused, and started picking pieces of grass out of the ground.

"Then what?" prompted Yuka.

"He--he kissed me. But that's not all--it's what he SAID to me!"

"Oh WOW! That's great!" her friend responded. "NO!"

The shout from Akane caught Yuka totally off guard. "Y-you mean you don't like him?" she asked.

"Yes! No! I...I...I don't know!" Akane cried, then put her head in her hands again. "Damn it! Why can't I figure this out!"

Yuka put her arm around her friend in an effort to console her.

"It's okay, Akane. Don't cry. I don't blame you for being confused. If Ranma was MY fiance, I'd be confused too."

"I can't figure him out! One minute he's nice to me, and the next he calls me names! He has all these GIRLS hanging all over him, and he doesn't do anything about it! Yet he said that to me--"

Akane cut herself off short, and turned bright red.

"What DID he say?" prompted Yuka.

Akane's reply was a whisper.

"I already told you. He said I was the only girl he ever wanted to kiss."

Yuka looked at Akane for a moment as if she wanted to say something but wasn't sure if she should.

"W-what is it?" Akane asked.

"Is that when he kissed you?"

"Yes."

"How did it feel?"

Akane's expression went from confused to dreamy.

"Wonderful."

Yuka began to giggle. Akane just stared at her friend for a moment, and then discovered that it was catching. Soon the both of them were lost in giggles.

After a minute or two Yuka calmed down, and hugged Akane.

"Feeling better now?"

"A little," Akane replied.

"I'm gonna tell you something," Yuka said. "It might help."

"I could use it," Akane said as the mirth on her face disappeared.

"I don't think you should be upset. I think you should be happy! You're always jealous of other girls, and Ranma told you straight out that he wants YOU."

"I am NOT jealous!"

Yuka exploded into giggles again.

"Yeah, sure...and you don't like Ranma, right?"

"What do you mean I don't like Ranma? Of course I like him...eep!"

"Akane?"

Akane looked rather sheepish. "I do like him, don't I?"

"Well!" laughed Yuka. "It's about time you figured that one out!"

Akane ignored her friend as she ran the words through her mind.  
\*I-like-Ranma!\* Then she noticed something. She didn't feel confused anymore. As a matter of fact, Akane hadn't felt this sure of anything since Ranma had arrived in Nerima.

Then another thought came to her, one that brought a huge smile to her face. \*And Ranma likes me!\*

"Hey, Akane?" Yuka asked. You okay?"

"Okay?" she replied, her face totally enveloped in a smile. "I've never been MORE okay in my life!"

"Good! Now lets finish eating so we can get to gym!"

The girls rushed through their meals and got up. As Yuka took a step, she found herself restrained by Akane.

"Do me a favor, Yuka?"

"What's that?"

"Can you keep this between us for now? I'm not sure if I'm ready for the whole world to find out."

Yuka hugged Akane. "I won't say a word. You should know me better than that!"

-----

At that moment in another part of the schoolyard, another conversation was taking place.

"Are you sure?" Nabiki asked as she raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"I-it's just as I said, honest!" stuttered Keiko. "Your sister tied Kodachi Kuno up and told her that she couldn't have Ranma!"

Keiko paused as if thinking, and continued.

"I think she also said something about Ranma's kissing her being no one's business but her own...but that was before Kodachi showed up."

"S-she said that?"

Nabiki's head reeled from that information. \*What has gotten into my little sister?\*

"Thank you Keiko. Keep your eyes and ears open, and report to me if anything new develops."

As Keiko walked away, a thought occurred to Nabiki. She'd dismissed the same thought earlier but now it didn't seem so ridiculous. \*Could my little sister actually be falling for that moron?\*

She shook her head but couldn't get the feeling to go away

\*No. It's too soon to believe that yet. I'm gonna have to keep

digging until I'm sure. I don't know...but if it is true, what do I do about it?\*

Nabiki finished off her lunch with the idea still running through her head. Then she finally came to a decision, and muttered "I may not know what's going on yet, but if my little sister and Ranma think they can hide it from me they both are sadly mistaken."

Back in the empty classroom, Ranma sneezed.

-----

Akane and Yuka had taken so much time talking and eating that they were among the last girls to arrive in the locker room. Yuka turned the handle of her locker, pulled it open, and screamed.

She immediately became the center of attention, because a wrinkled old pervert had come flying out of the locker and had attached himself to her chest.

"Happosai?" Akane yelled.

"Oh! So many young beauties, and so little time!" He then turned to Akane. "I'm sorry Akane, but you will have to wait your turn. I'm rather busy now."

The girls grabbed anything that could be used as weapons--hockey sticks, baseball bats, tennis rackets...one of the girls even had a javelin.

"Let's get him!" one of the other girls shouted.

"Oh my!" Happosai said at the sight of all the armed girls. "I just remembered another appointment. Bye!"

The lecher then jumped out the door with the whole girls' gym class in hot pursuit. Akane was leading the way.

-----

Somewhere in Nerima, a lone traveler walked along the road, his head buried in a map.

"Now, let's see...which way is north?"

He shifted his backpack and sighed.

"Okay! I got it figured out! All I have to do is follow the map, then--no more curse!"

Images flooded the boy's mind. Images of him-- a full man--with the love of his life, Akane Tendo, in his arms. At their feet, his accursed foe Ranma Saotome begged for mercy.

His insane laughter made everyone near him flee in terror.

"Soon, Saotome," Ryoga Hibiki shouted, "I will finish you once and for all!"

Ryoga took another look at the map.

"North. It's north."

He looked at the sun, squinted, and headed south.

-----

To be continued

Special thanks to Gary Kleppe and Brad Crawford for prereading, and to Ronny Hedin and Don Granberry for their assistance in editing!

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#### 4. Default Chapter Title

From: KaraOhki To: ffml Subject: [FFML] [fanfic][Ranma][A Kiss to the Victor, chapter 4 (FINAL)] Date: Wednesday, March 15, 2000 10:42 PM

A Kiss to the Victor

A Ranma 1/2 fanfic by Hound & Cabbit Productions (David "Fido" Lindquist [fido@rma.edu] and June "KaraOhki" Geraci [karaohki@snet.net])

Revised (Final) March 15, 2000

Ranma 1/2 was created by Rumiko Takahashi. We're just borrowing her characters for a little while. Special thanks to our prereaders Gary Kleppe and DFROeder. Enjoy!

Earlier chapters can be read at  
<http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/rothko/228>, or [www.karaohki.com](http://www.karaohki.com)

#### Chapter 4

Ranma finished his lunch and put the bento away. Then he noticed the time.

"Damn! I'm going to be late for gym!"

He stood up to leave the room, but the sound of many angry voices coming from the open window distracted him. He immediately recognized the loudest as Akane.

"Get that pervert!"

"It's gotta be Hoppo," muttered Ranma as he ran down the stairs to assist Akane.

By the time Ranma got out of the school, Hoppoai was nowhere to be seen.

"Now where..."

>From the other side of the school grounds he could see a large angry mob going around the corner.

\*There he is,\* he thought, sprinting toward the group.

He caught up with them easily enough, then began to hop the rooftops in an effort to get ahead of their target. However, Ranma stopped when he saw a familiar face.

\*Ryoga?\*

Before he could do or say anything, Ranma saw Hoppoai bounce off his rival/friend's head. Ryoga, surprised by the attack, was knocked down, but before he could recover, the mob that was chasing the old freak ran over him and stopped.

After watching the scene unfold, Ranma chuckled.

\*Never catch a break, do you P-chan?\* he thought.

-----

Ryoga blushed as Akane helped him to his feet. Then he looked around, and realized he was surrounded by girls, all of whom were carrying various items of sports equipment. It didn't take much for him to realize that they were meant to be weapons. The javelin especially made him shiver.

"Um, what's going on, Akane?"

"Hoppoai got into our locker room."

Ryoga didn't need any more explanation.

"Where is he?" he roared.

"The little creep got away," Akane replied. "But next time we'll be ready for him. Right, girls?"

The entire group of girls began shouting things like "Yeah!" and "Damn straight!"

"Come on!" one of them said. "We need to start planning so we can make sure the old freak gets a VERY warm reception next time!"

As they left, the girls started talking about what they could do to protect their locker room. Akane stayed behind.

"You girls go on," Akane said as the others walked away. "I want to make sure Ryoga's okay."

Akane didn't see Ryoga blush, but someone else did....

-----

>From his vantage point on the roof, Ranma frowned as he watched the other girls leave.

\*Why didn't Akane go with them?\* he asked himself.

For some reason the idea of them alone together made Ranma very uncomfortable. He continued to watch as Ryoga and Akane talked. The longer they did though, the more uncomfortable he became.

It was at that time he noticed that Ryoga had started to fidget.

\*What the..?\* Then Ranma realized what he was doing. \*He..he's trying to ask her out!!\*

The rest of the thought was replaced of images of Akane and P-chan, her holding the piglet to her bosom, doting on him. Then the final image of Akane taking him to her bedroom and sleeping in the same bed together.

Ranma's fingers began to twitch.

\*How DARE he!!!\* he thought as a white hot rage began to boil inside of him.

-----

"THIS IS FOR YOU!"

As Akane accepted his gift, Ryoga felt miserable. \*I can't believe I'm such a coward!\* he thought. \*I can't even get up enough courage to ask her out!\*

Akane thanked Ryoga for the soba, but he didn't hear her. He was too busy trying to figure out why he felt such a strong sense of danger.

\*Where, who?\* He looked behind him, and then his eyes were drawn up. There. Ranma was sitting on a nearby roof. The look on his face was one he'd hadn't see before on his rival. It sent a slight shiver of fear through him.

\*What's with him? Why's he so angry?\*

Before Ryoga could draw any conclusions, Ranma moved. Without taking his eyes from Ryoga, he descended from the roof and ran towards them.

-----

\*Why was that so hard for him?\* thought Akane. \*I know he's shy, but he's an extreme case.\*

The sound of running feet made Akane spin around and assume a combat stance. When she saw Ranma, all the events of the past two days came back to her. She started to feel giddy, but stopped when she saw his face. He was angry. No, not angry. He was MAD! It instantly made her blood run cold. She'd never seen him like this! Ever!

"R-Ranma! What are you doing here?"

"Making sure you're okay," he replied, his eyes never seeming to leave Ryoga.

"I-I'm fine."

"You sure?"

"O-of course I'm sure! You think I wouldn't know if I'm okay or not? I'm fine!"

Despite her annoyance and concern over the way Ranma was acting, a part of her mind was overjoyed that he was there.

\*He came to check on me! He wanted to make sure I was okay!\*

Ranma had done this sort of thing before, but this time Akane felt differently about it. Instead of resenting it, she was glad he was there. To her great embarrassment, Akane found herself blushing. Unfortunately, the reddening of Akane's cheeks gave Ryoga a different message.

"Saotome! Why are you bothering Akane?"

"None of your business, P-chan!" Ranma growled back.

"STOP CALLING ME P-CHAN!!!!" Ryoga screamed, and threw a punch.

Akane barely had time to get out of the way before the two martial artists started fighting. The kicks and punches were flying so fast that she couldn't even begin to keep track of them. However, almost as quickly as it began, the fight was finished when Ranma punted his rival into the stratosphere.

"Ranma, was that REALLY necessary?"

"HE started it!"

"I don't care WHO started it! Can't the two of you ever get along?"

"We do get along! I just don't like it when he takes advantage of you!"

"When he what? Ranma, Ryoga doesn't take advantage of me. What on earth makes you think that?"

"Well, you'd think it too if--" Ranma stopped himself just in time.  
\*If you knew he was P-chan,\* he mentally finished. He stood there stunned. He had almost revealed Ryoga's secret.

Akane stood there waiting for Ranma to finish his sentence. Instead, he stood there looking very embarrassed. Then she thought of a reason why he looked that way.

\*He can't be jealous of my friendship with Ryoga, can he?\*

Inside, she was rather pleased; however, she wasn't about to let

Ranma know that. Instead, she put her hands on her hips and glared at him.

"You don't have an explanation, do you? I think you owe Ryoga an apology!"

Ranma's expression changed from embarrassed to annoyed. What? Me apologize to him? When pigs fly!"

"Ranma, you jerk!"

He was surprised to find himself flying into orbit.

-----

Kasumi had been working hard all afternoon, and was treating herself to a cup of tea on the porch when something landed in the koi pond.

\*It must be Ranma,\* she thought, and got up to see. To her surprise, P-chan crawled out of the pond.

"You poor thing! Let me dry you off, and you can wait for Akane to come home."

All P-chan could do is let out a small 'bwee' before passing out.

-----

As Ranma sailed through the sky, he was deep in thought.

\*I'm sick and tired of Ryoga sleeping in Akane's bed. But what can I do about it? He never listens when I talk to him.\* Then he got an idea. \*I only hope it works.\*

Ranma looked down as he began to descend. \*She sent me back to the dojo.\* Then he realized where he was going to land. \*Not the pond!\*

-----

Kasumi was inside, drying the piglet off, when a second splash occurred. Seconds later, Ranma stood on the porch, wringing out her shirt.

She spotted P-chan in Kasumi's arms, and thought quickly. "Kasumi, I need a hot bath. Why don't you let me take P-chan with me?"

Kasumi looked at Ranma doubtfully. "Are you sure, Ranma? P-chan doesn't like you very much."

"Don't worry, I can handle him." Ranma took the pig from Kasumi and headed for the bathing room, dragging a damp backpack with her.

\*Man, I hope nobody's using the furo,\* thought Ranma.

The bathing room was empty. Ranma tossed Ryoga's knapsack against the wall as she dumped the pig into the tub. Ranma was unbuttoning her

shirt when she noticed that a folded paper had fallen out of the knapsack.

"What's this?"

"SAOTOME! GIVE THAT BACK!" shouted the now-transformed Ryoga.

The lost boy lunged at his nemesis in an effort to grab the paper but was stopped short by a foot to his face. With Ryoga subdued, Ranma looked at the paper. When she realized what she was holding, she looked at Ryoga in disbelief.

"R..Ryoga! Do you know what this is?!?"

"Of course I do! Why do you think I didn't want you to see it!"

Ranma sat down on the floor, her shirt half unbuttoned and completely forgotten. How on earth had Ryoga gotten his hands on a map to a Japanese nanniichuan? Then something hit Ranma--Ryoga had been trying to keep the map a secret! Ryoga was going to cure himself and allow Ranma to stay cursed.

"So, you were going to let me suffer with my curse, right?" The tone of her voice was as cold as ice.

Ryoga's eyes showed a small bit of guilt before he smothered it with anger.

"Give my map back!" he repeated.

"No. Look, you are going to need help finding it"

"I DON'T NEED..."

"Yes you do! You couldn't find your way out of a closet! In the morning, we are going to follow this map to the spring, and then get our cure!"

"I don't--bwee!??!"

"I'm soooo glad you agree with me!" Ranma smiled as she put down the empty bucket.

-----

By the time Akane got home, Ryoga had changed himself back. She immediately invited him to stay for dinner. When they sat down to eat, she began to regret issuing the invitation. Ryoga sat on her right, and Ranma on her left. All they did during the meal was glare back and forth at each other.

\*There they go again,\* Akane thought. \*I wish I knew what was wrong with them!\*

Unfortunately, Akane didn't have a clue on what to do to make them stop, so she tried, rather unsuccessfully, to ignore them. As soon as dinner was over, she jumped up from her place on the floor.

"Kasumi, let me help you clean up."

Akane gathered a stack of dishes off the table and ran into the kitchen as if someone was chasing her, leaving the two combatants at the table staring at each other. However when she came back into the room for the rest of the dishes, they were gone.

-----

Ranma let go of Ryoga's shirt after they landed on the roof. He couldn't afford to have their conversation overheard by any of the Tendos, especially Nabiki. The very thought of her knowing about something as big as Ryoga's curse scared him half to death.

"Ranma! What are you doing dragging me up here?!"

"I got something you have to hear, Ryoga, so just shut up and listen!"

Ryoga folded his arms and glared at Ranma, but didn't make any move to leave. "Whatever it is, say it already!"

"Okay, I will! I don't want P-chan sleeping with Akane any more!"

"What gives YOU the right to say that?"

"Because I know who P-chan is and I'm sick of you dishonoring her!"

Ryoga was completely taken aback. "D-dishonoring her?"

"Yeah! What do you think you were doing, sleeping with her like that?"

"But, but!"

"But what? Are you THAT dumb? DAMN IT! Do you know how she'll feel if she ever finds out?"

"She'll never want to see me again," he said.

"Probably," Ranma replied, "but then she'll be heartbroken, and if that happens..."

The lost boy involuntarily took a step away from his rival. Ranma seemed to radiate anger.

"I will make you wish you were dead."

"H-how dare you threaten me!" Ryoga stammered. He immediately threw a roundhouse kick at Ranma. Unfortunately for Ryoga, Ranma easily sidestepped it then gave him a light shove during his follow through. That was all it took for Ryoga to fall off the roof.

SPLASH!

Ranma's anger immediately dissipated into a sigh. He dropped down to the ground just as the black piglet climbed out of the koi pond.

"So," he said, "do you understand?"

The piglet looked up at Ranma, who could see tears in its eyes as it nodded. The pigtailed martial artist fished Ryoga's clothes out of the pond, then picked up P-chan.

"Look at it this way, after tomorrow you won't BE P-chan any more!"

The piglet seemed to perk up a little at that.

-----

Ranma headed for the house with P-chan, hoping to get him to the furo before anyone saw him. He was on the porch when he saw Akane's silhouette through the screen, and realized he couldn't get away with it. \*I've gotta hide these clothes,\* he thought, and put the piglet down while he stashed the clothing under the porch.

Unfortunately, during the few seconds P-chan was out of his sight, Akane found him.

"P-Chan! Where have you been? I haven't seen you in a while!"

\*Oh no!\* thought Ranma as he dashed into the house. Akane was already heading for the stairs.

She turned and smiled, and cheerfully waved a hand at him.

"Good night, Ranma!"

Akane was halfway up the stairs when she turned around.

"Where's Ryoga?"

"Oh, he's around. You know him--he'd get lost in a broom closet!"

P-chan let out a snort, then glared at Ranma.

Akane looked at Ranma rather suspiciously. "Well if you see him, tell him good night for me."

\*Why does she want me to say good night to Ryoga for her?\*

A wave of jealousy swept over Ranma, and he struggled to suppress it.

\*Aw, she's probably just being nice. I hope.\*

"Ranma, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing!"

"Fine, don't tell me! I'm going to bed!"

Ranma watched Akane turn around and continue up the stairs. He didn't know what to do, or think. After what he'd said earlier, was Ryoga going to allow Akane to take him to bed? He got his answer seconds

later.

"P-chan! What's wrong? If you don't quit squirming I might drop you!"

Ranma's concern lessened upon hearing that. \*I don't have much choice but to trust him,\* he thought.

-----

"There's something going on," she said aloud. "What do you think, P-chan?"

Akane jumped. Had P-chan just nodded at her? No, of course not. Akane sighed and got into bed. It had been a long day, and her imagination was getting away with her.

"Come on, P-chan," she said, holding her arms out for her pet. The little black piglet started to walk towards her, then stopped.

"What's the matter, baby? Come to Mama!"

P-chan turned slightly and hopped up onto the foot of her bed. He then curled up at her feet and lay there.

Akane stared at the piglet. P-chan stared back. \*He looks so sad.\*

She reached for her pet, only to have him move out of the way and settle back near her feet again.

Akane sighed. "All right, P-chan. If that's where you want to sleep, that's fine with me."

Once she settled into bed, Akane let her mind drift to the day's events.

She tried to think about school, or the traps they'd set for Hoppo-sai, but no matter what she tried to focus on all that kept popping into her mind was what had just happened on the stairs. Ranma had been acting very strangely. Then Akane gasped and sat up.

\*Of course!\* she thought. \*He's jealous!\*

Everything seemed to fall into place for her. Ranma's attitude towards Ryoga. The glaring contest at dinner. All of it.

Akane became aware that P-chan was sitting up and staring at her. He actually looked concerned. "It's nothing, P-chan. Go back to sleep." She watched the piglet, who performed what looked like a shrug before he lay down again.

\*Sometimes he acts so human.\*

\*So, he's jealous of Ryoga.\* She thought about it for a few minutes before she came to a decision. \*I have to tell him that he has no reason to be. At least he won't be picking on Ryoga as much!\*

Having made that decision, Akane found it easy to lie down and get comfortable again. Her thoughts remained with Ranma. She wondered if he would repeat what he'd done that morning--hold her hand under the breakfast table.

\*I could get used to that,\* she thought. \*His hand was so warm.\*

The memory of Ranma's hand on hers was so strong that Akane could almost feel it. The sense of warmth and security soon sent her off to sleep.

-----

P-chan grunted slightly as he pulled Akane's door closed. Getting away from her had been a lot easier than normal. Of course that was due to the fact that she didn't have him in her usual vise-like grip.

A part of the piglet missed the way Akane held him, but then he was hit with the thought of the dishonor that would cause her.

\*I can't think about that any more! Just focus on getting the map from Ranma and getting the cure and then...maybe I'll have a chance with Akane!\*

For once luck was with the cursed lost boy, it only took him twenty minutes to find his way to the furo.

\* Finally. Now to change back." The piglet quickly turned on the hot water. Once the tub was full, he jumped in and transformed back to human. Momentarily blinded by the water, he stretched out his arm in an attempt to feel around for a towel.

"Where's that towel? I've got to get that map and get out of here before Saotome finds out!" he mumbled irritably.

"Here you go," a voice said in response.

"Thanks," Ryoga said. Then he realized who had handed him the towel. He also noticed that Ranma looked less than friendly.

"Thinking about leaving me behind?"

Ranma held up Ryoga's clothes, his backpack, and the map.

"You won't get very far without this stuff."

"Damn you, Saotome!"

"Look Ryoga, this is our chance to get rid of the curses once and for all. Don't screw it up by being pig-headed about it!"

"That map is MINE!!" Ryoga shouted. "IT WAS YOUR FAULT!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah....it was my fault you are cursed...whatever."

"AARGH!" Ryoga flew out of the tub, arms outstretched for Ranma's neck. "DIE!!!!"

Ranma deftly sidestepped Ryoga's attack. "So you wanna get dressed or are you going as is?"

Ryoga turned several shades of red, and grabbed his clothes and backpack. He thought about trying to take the map also, but decided against it. As much as he hated to admit it, Ranma was right about him needing help finding the spring. By the time Ryoga finished dressing he looked somewhat calmer, though nowhere near happy.

"Let's get the hell out of here."

"Hey, P-chan! The door is this way."

-----

Nabiki observed Akane closely as she ate her breakfast. They'd sent her upstairs to call Ranma, but he wasn't there.

Akane kept glancing to her side, seemingly confused about Ranma's absence.

They gathered their lunches and bags and set off for school. Again, Nabiki observed that Akane was looking for Ranma. She kept glancing up at the fence, as if she expected to see him walking beside her.

\*I'm not going to get a better chance to do this,\* she thought. "So, Sis, where's Ranma?"

"How should I know?" Akane replied. Her voice was a mixture of irritability and worry.

"Seems to me the two of you are getting along a little better these days."

Nabiki watched all the color drain from her sister's face.

"W-well, he's been less annoying than usual, that's all."

"Could that possibly have anything to do with the play? You spent all that time together...supposedly rehearsing."

"WE DID REHEARSE!"

Nabiki didn't think it was possible for Akane to get paler, but she didn't respond. She gripped her schoolbag tighter, and quickened her pace.

\*I do believe I've struck a nerve,\* she thought. \*I'll let it rest, for now.\*

-----

Ranma never did show up for school. Akane gave the teacher a half-hearted excuse about a bad cold, and spent the rest of the morning brooding over his absence. By the time lunch came, she was starting to get worried.

\*Is Ranma in some kind of trouble? Why didn't he tell me?\*

On top of that, Akane had to deal with Shampoo, who'd arrived with lunch for her "airen".

"What you mean Ranma no come to school today?"

"I mean he didn't come! Is that so hard to understand?"

Shampoo looked around suspiciously. "You hide Ranma. Shampoo find!"

Akane was relieved when Shampoo took off to search for Ranma.

\*Thank goodness she's gone!\* Then she quickly stood up. \*Oh no! I forgot to check the traps by the gym!\*

-----

The sun was shining brightly as Ranma and Ryoga made their way along the street. The bickering had almost stopped between them for one simple reason.

They were close.

Very close.

All Ranma could think of now was the cure. \*The first thing I'm gonna do is go for a swim and then...then I show Akane.\* He wasn't sure what her reaction would be but he hoped she wouldn't get upset at him for not telling her about it.

"How much farther?" Ryoga asked.

"Not far at all, just around this corner and look for the last marker and we'll be there."

"Good."

Ranma was so intent on the map that he never noticed the evil grin on his companion's face.

-----

Akane and her friends were changing into their gym clothes when they heard the sounds of fighting outside.

"Give that back, you idiot! You're going the wrong way!"

Akane frowned slightly. \*Is that Ranma's voice?\*

"EEK! The pervert is back!" one of the girls shrieked.

"Akane! What are we going to do??" another girl asked.

"Huh?" she replied. "Oh, that. We aren't going to do anything."

"What? There's a..."

The rest of the girl's words were drowned out by a loud "SPROING" sound.

"Remember the traps?" As if on cue, the sound of the other traps filled the air.

CRASH! Tinkle...BOOM!

"We caught him!" "It worked!" "Let's go get him!" the girls shouted as they started to run outside.

"Hey!" Akane shouted just before the girls left. "Don't you think you all should get dressed first?"

-----

Ranma and Ryoga were barely able to get out of the traps and hide before the girls came out of the locker room. The girls ran all around the area searching for them while the boys watched them from a high branch in a nearby tree.

Eventually they gave up and went back inside. Up in the tree, Ryoga glared at Ranma.

"Are you SURE you read that map right?"

"Damn it, LOOK at it! It's gotta be right under the floor of the locker room!"

Ryoga turned a little pale. "But, but the girls are in there."

"Gee," Ranma replied sarcastically, "what was your first clue?"

"T-that means we can't go in there. A-Akane might not be, I mean, she's probably..."

Ryoga didn't have to finish his sentence for Ranma to get a vivid mental picture of Akane in her underwear. The image brought him very close to a nosebleed.

\*We can't go sneaking in there,\* he thought. \*The girls'll kill us, and I don't want Akane getting mad at me.\* He sat in the tree and tried to come up with a way to get in the locker room. They were so close!

Ranma brooded for a bit. Each plan he came up with was immediately shot down for one reason. Akane.

Then it hit him.

\*Of course,\* he thought. \*We'll wait 'til she comes out and have her help us!\* The idea was perfect except for one small detail.

\*How am I gonna explain why Ryoga has to come with me?\*

He was deep in thought, trying to figure out what to tell Akane, when he caught something moving out of the corner of his eye. Ryoga caught

it too, and elbowed him in the side.

"Look there," he whispered. "Happosai."

Ranma nodded. "You think he's going after the girls again?"

Ryoga stared at Ranma. A look of total shock was on his face. A few seconds later, Ranma realized exactly what he had just said, and hung his head in embarrassment.

"Well, THAT was a stupid question," he muttered, then raised his head up, a determined expression on his face. "Let's get that freak!"

-----

Creeping silently through the brush, Happosai imagined what he would see in the locker room. \*All those young women, and panties! And they are all going to be MINE!\*

Happosai started to move forward, but found his progress impeded. He looked over his shoulder. Ryoga and Ranma were holding onto his shirt. He pulled free, and glared at the two young men now standing in front of him.

"Can't you let an old man have his fun? Go away!"

"You ain't going in there, freak!" growled Ranma.

"I won't let you near Akane," cried Ryoga.

Happosai merely chuckled. "Sorry, boys, but it will take more than the two of you to stop me!"

Ranma's reply was simple.

"Wanna bet?"

-----

The sounds of battle penetrated the locker room. Akane pulled on her shirt, and headed for the door.

"He's back! Let's GET him!"

The sight that met their eyes when they got outside made them all stare. Happosai was being chased by two guys. They were moving so fast that it took the girls a few seconds to realize it was Ranma and Akane's friend Ryoga. Almost immediately, Akane started chasing after the old pervert. It didn't take her friends long to join her.

Happosai soon realized that this was NOT the right day to raid the locker room, and he disappeared.

After he left, the girls stared at the other two martial artists. Ranma could hear some of the girls whispering among themselves. 00 "Why are they here?" one said.

"Maybe they wanted to peep on us?" another said. "After all, Akane

always calls him a pervert."

"I do not!" A familiar voice called out.

The girls stared in surprise at Akane.

"But Akane," one said, "you do!"

"W-well, maybe I was wrong! Let's see what they want."

Ryoga started to talk but Ranma spoke first.

"We were walking by when we saw the pervert hopping the fence and we decided to stop him."

That comment made all of the girls smile. They showered Ranma and Ryoga with thanks, making the martial artists go red with embarrassment.

Their thanks was cut short by the bell.

"We're gonna be late!" one of the girls said.

They all took off for the volleyball court, but Akane remained behind.

\*Perfect!\* thought Ranma. \*Maybe I can get her to help us.\*

His thoughts were interrupted by Akane's voice.

"Where were you this morning?"

Ranma knew that tone instantly.

\*If I don't say the right thing, she's gonna clobber me.\*

"I-I was looking for a cure."

"A cure?"

Ranma silently held out the map. Akane looked at it suspiciously.

"Under the floor of the locker room? Where did you GET this thing?"

"I didn't! It's Ryoga's!"

To Ranma's amazement, Akane dropped the map and hugged Ryoga.

"Thank you! Ryoga, that's the nicest thing anyone has EVER done! You found a cure for Ranma!"

Ryoga looked absolutely panicked when Akane glomped onto him. He turned white, then red, and then a thin trickle of blood ran from one nostril.

Ranma felt his anger rising at the scene before him. This needed to stop, and stop right now.

"Hey, we ain't got TIME for this! We hafta get into the locker room before the girls come back."

-----

Akane stared at Ranma. He was so angry she could feel the heat radiating from him.

\*Why is Ranma so upset...oh yeah! He's jealous again! Maybe I shouldn't have hugged Ryoga.\*

"Will you help us, Akane?"

Despite her growing feeling of affection, a bit of suspicion crawled into Akane's mind.

"Help you?"

"Yeah, Ryoga's gonna help me find the spring. Can you be a lookout?"

\*But it's the girl's locker room. Should I be helping him?\*

She was about to refuse out of sheer reflex when she remembered why Ranma wanted to get in.

"O-okay...I suppose I can. But you have to hurry. The janitor is coming to work on a broken shower."

"That's why you have to be a lookout!"

Akane led the way to the locker room, then went partway outside.

\*I should be able to see or hear anyone coming from here.\*

-----

Inside, Ranma studied the map, while Ryoga looked over his shoulder. Ryoga looked up and pointed across the room.

"I think it's down here."

"No way, P-chan! It's this way!"

"Quit calling me P-chan!"

"I won't be able to soon, right?"

Ranma stopped short.

"And you won't be able to sleep with Akane any more, will you? Exactly where DID you sleep last night?"

"By her feet!" Ryoga replied indignantly. "Unlike some people, I keep my word!"

Ranma ignored the insult. The argument was getting them nowhere.

"Look, let's just find the spring, okay?"

"Yeah," muttered Ryoga.

-----

The girls finished warming up, and were choosing the practice groups for their volleyball teams when they realized one girl was missing.

"Hey, what happened to Akane?" asked Yuka. "We can't practice without our captain!"

"You don't think she went after Hoppo, do you?"

"I'll bet she's waiting to ambush him in the locker room! Let's go help!"

-----

"This is the spot. I'm sure of it." Ranma knelt down and ran his hand over the floor. "If you use your Breaking Point technique right here, we should uncover the spring."

"Are you sure it's there?"

"Yeah."

"Good."

Ranma's combat sense screamed an alarm. He was just barely able to dodge the lost boy's punch.

"Ryoga! What are you doing?!?"

"That cure is going to be mine, Ranma! All mine!"

Ryoga started throwing punches and kicks at Ranma and soon the two were locked in a furious battle. The two of them became so engrossed in their fight that neither one noticed when Akane ran in.

"Ranma! Ryoga! The girls are coming back here!"

They both froze.

"T-they are coming here?" Ryoga blurted out.

"We can't get caught in here!!!!" Ranma yelled. The fight forgotten, the two boys began to run around the locker room searching for a place to hide.

If Akane wasn't so worried about getting caught, the sight of the two panicked boys would have had her falling down laughing.

\*I can't believe this\*, she thought.

"In here!" she shouted. Akane grabbed Ryoga as he ran by and shoved him into her open locker. Then she slammed the door. "Stay in there, and be quiet!"

After she shut the door, both she and Ranma began trying other locker doors. Unfortunately, all of them were locked. Ranma looked like he was about to panic again, and Akane suddenly realized what kind of a position they were in.

\*They're going to catch us alone. What are they going to think? It's true, I always DO call Ranma a pervert. They're going to think he's in here to steal panties, and I-I'm with him?\*

Akane started to look as panicked as Ranma, and then inspiration struck. \*I don't have much choice.\*

The handle of the locker room door began to turn, and Akane grabbed Ranma. "I hope this works."

"Wha?" was all Ranma could say before Akane's lips met his.

-----

The girls were stunned by what they saw. Akane was locked in a kiss with Ranma. A very passionate one, from the look of it.

"A-Akane?!" one of the girls cried out. "What are you doing?"

"Looks like she's rewarding her hero to me," Yuka remarked as she watched the couple pull apart and step away from each other.

"Hero?" her friend responded.

"Sure, Ranma chased that pervert away, didn't he?"

Yuka watched Akane closely as she replied. "Well, yes." Akane paused and looked at Ranma, who hadn't moved. "I figured this was the best place to get him alone...guess I was wrong."

Akane blushed and turned her head. Most of the girls felt a twinge of sympathy for their friend. If any of them had been caught there with a boyfriend, they would have died of embarrassment. As it was, Akane looked like she wanted to do just that.

She grabbed Ranma's arm and tugged on it. "Let's go, Ranma!"

"Huh?"

"Ranma, you can't hang out here all day! Now come on!"

"Huh?" he repeated, still in a daze.

Irritably, she grabbed his shirt and dragged him outside.

As she passed the girls, they heard her mumble "Idiot!" to which Ranma replied "Huh?"

Akane dragged Ranma around the side of the building, and sat down in the grass. Ranma collapsed beside her, still looking stunned.

"Hey, Ranma?"

"Ummm?"

"Would you PLEASE snap out of it!"

When she got no response from her fiance, Akane walked over to the outdoor spigot, then filled a punishment bucket with water.

\*Sorry, Ranma, but I have no choice.\* Taking the bucket in one hand, she emptied the contents over Ranma's head.

"Gaaah!" sputtered Ranma-chan. "What did you do that for?"

Then she noticed her surroundings.

"How did we get outside?"

"I'll explain that later. Now go change back and wait for me, okay?"

"Sure," Ranma replied. She watched her leave the grounds. Once Ranma was out of sight, Akane couldn't help but grin.

Ryoga sat inside the locker, his ear pressed against the door. Were the girls going to be in here all day?

"Hey, Akane, it's about time you came back!"

"Sorry."

"We've got to get SOME practice in!" complained another girl.

Ryoga held his breath. \*Yes! They're FINALLY leaving!\* He was getting very uncomfortable. Ryoga listened closely as the footsteps retreated, and slowly opened the door.

Ryoga caught a quick glimpse of the custodian and quickly closed the door. \*Damn. Why does he have to choose NOW to come here?\* Through the slits in the door, Ryoga watched in frustration as the custodian began to work on a shower head. \*I can't get out of here now!\* Ryoga thought as he shifted slightly in the tight enclosed space.

The heat and cramped position were making Ryoga more and more upset. But he knew exactly who was to blame.

\*This is all Ranma's fault!\*

Ranma leaned against the wall as he waited for Akane to come back. He still couldn't figure out how he got outside.

\*Man, did I get knocked out?\* he wondered. \*Now what's the last thing I remember?\*

His mind replayed the events up to all the way from when they entered the locker room up until the moment Akane grabbed him.

Then he remembered what happened next...

\*S-she kissed me!\* His eyes widened as he thought about it. In fact, it was less of a memory than a re-experiencing of the kiss. He could almost feel Akane's lips on his. It was instinct that made him kiss back. It had to have been because he couldn't remember doing anything afterwards.

\*Wow...\* was all he could think.

After a few minutes, Ranma looked at the locker room.

\*I wonder what's keeping Ryoga? There's no way he could have gotten lost.\* He then shook his head sadly. \*If there's a way, he would find it,\* he sighed. \*I hope he finds his way out soon.\*

-----

"Akane, do us a favor, would you?" asked Yuka, as the girls walked back to the locker room after practice.

"What's that?"

"DON'T kiss Ranma before our next match. We'll lose for sure if our captain can't play!"

Akane blushed, and couldn't think of anything to say in response.

The girls had nearly reached the locker room when one of them walked up beside Akane.

"Hey, Akane! Your fiance looks like he wants to talk to you."

She pointed over to the side of the building, where Ranma stood, waving his arms at her.

\*Now what?\* Akane wondered, then she took off towards Ranma at a run.

She grabbed him by the arm and dragged him out of sight behind the building.

"What?"

"Ryoga never came out of the locker room!"

"WHAT????"

"He didn't come out! Jeeze, what's wrong with your hearing?"

"But--but the girls are changing in there, and Ryoga's locked in with MY clothes!"

"I guess we'll have to wait until the girls leave, then."

Akane thought about what he had said. \*I don't have a choice,\* she finally concluded.

Ranma sat down on the grass and patted the space beside him.

-----

"I always thought those two liked each other more than they admitted to."

"Yeah, and now we have proof! That was SOME kiss!"

One of the girls looked toward the door before she spoke.

"Akane's still out there with him. You think they're kissing again?"

Another giggled. "Probably. Want to go peek?"

Yuka then spoke up. "No. Just leave them alone."

The girls heard Yuka's tone of voice and realized she meant business. They quieted down, and continued changing their clothes.

-----

Inside the locker, Ryoga couldn't believe his ears.

\*A-Akane and Ranma kissed?!\*

It had to be the truth, because all of the girls were talking about it, but how could that happen?

Ryoga was devastated. He had dreamed about kissing Akane, and now she had been kissed twice by a two-timing idiot who didn't know what love meant.

\*Poor Akane...I bet she hated it.\* he mentally sobbed.

He sat there in the locker, trying not to think about the kiss. Instead, he looked around himself in the dim light, trying to find a distraction. Seconds later his eyes were squeezed tightly shut. \*I will NOT stare at Akane's underwear.\*

Then the silence in the locker room was broken by a comment from one of the girls.

"Akane sure looked like she was having a good time, I'll tell you that."

Another sighed.

"I wish it was ME!"

Ryoga's heart fell down to his toes, and stayed there. He was so devastated that he barely registered the sounds of the girls leaving the locker room.

Mechanically, he opened the door and stepped out of the locker, stretching his stiff limbs. He sat on the floor, head down, trying to

come to terms with what he had heard.

\*They can't have been right. Akane couldn't possibly have enjoyed that kiss.\*

Then a terrible idea struck him.

\*Ranma had to have forced her! I'm going to KILL him!\*

In a rage, he slammed his fist into the floor, punching through the tile and going beyond it. The anger was instantly gone from his face and replaced with fear as he heard the gurgling of water.

All he could do before the cold water hit him was sigh, "why ME?"

-----

Ranma and Akane sat in the grass, not looking at each other or speaking. Each of them was too busy thinking.

\*I wonder what she's thinking about,\* Ranma thought. \*Is she happy I'm about to get cured?\*

\*I wonder what he's thinking about?\* thought Akane. \*His cure? I've never known Ranma without a curse...will he be different?\* She reached out and placed her hand over his. \*I like him the way he is. I hope this doesn't change him much.\*

\*Ohmygod she's holding my hand. Now what do I do?\*

Ranma was spared the agony of making a decision when they both noticed the last of Akane's classmates leaving the locker room.

"Umm, I-I think the room's clear," he said.

They both stood up, neither one letting go of the other's hand, and started running for the locker room door. They hadn't gone more than a few steps before the roof of the building gave way to the force of the geyser beneath it.

"What the?" gasped Akane.

"Akane! Look out!" Ranma immediately threw himself on top of her. \*I can't let the water touch her!\* Then he felt a familiar feeling, one he didn't think he'd ever feel again. He was changing. Seconds later, he was soaked and female, while Akane was merely soaked.

"It-it didn't work! It's just WATER!"

"Oh, Ranma..." Akane said. "I'm so sor-what's that?"

"Huh?"

Ranma looked up in time to see a little black piglet falling out of the sky.

"P-CHAN!" his fiancee yelled, as she ran to catch her pet. "What were you doing up there?"

\*Well, how about that? I've finally seen a pig fly,\* Ranma thought.  
\*But how come we didn't change and where is that spring?\*

Almost as if on cue, Ranma was hit on the head by another object. "Owww," she groaned, as she reached down to pick up whatever had beaned her. It was a large pot.

\*Flying pots? And I thought pigs were strange.\*

Ranma looked at the pot, wondering where it had come from. It certainly looked quite old. Then it developed a long crack in its side, and fell into two pieces. A rolled up scroll fell out.

"What's that, Ranma?"

"I dunno, Akane. It flew through the roof with the water."

The two unrolled the scroll on the grass. It was covered with writing, and Ranma read it aloud.

"Thank you for your continued patronage. Unfortunately, the Japanese Nanniichuan has closed. Please visit the original Nanniichuan at Jusenkyo in mainland China."

Akane watched with concern as Ranma's head went down, and she covered her face with her hands.

"All that for nothing. Why???"

Akane put P-chan down on the grass and put her arm around Ranma's shoulders.

"I wish I knew. I'm so sorry!" She accompanied the words with a little hug, and was glad to see Ranma respond to it. She uncovered her face, and looked up at Akane with a weak smile.

"You know something? If that was the spring, you'd be a guy right now."

"EEP!" For a second, it looked as though Akane was going to pass out. "I could have been cursed to turn into a GUY?"

She looked so horrified that Ranma couldn't help but chuckle.

"What a pair we would have been! Me with no curse, and you with a brand-new one. I guess I'm kinda glad it was plain water after all."

Akane's expression softened, and her hand went to Ranma's cheek.

"You're not sorry?"

The other girl shrugged. "Hey, just because this didn't work doesn't mean there's not a cure out there somewhere."

Ranma noticed that Akane looked thoughtful.

"Ranma," she said quietly, "why didn't you wait until after school to go to the locker room? It would have been empty then."

"I don't know," he replied. "I guess I was in such a hurry to get cured that I didn't think."

"Dummy," she replied affectionately.

Ranma was too surprised at Akane's tone of voice to respond.

"Come on, I need to get out of these wet clothes and you need some hot water." Akane picked P-chan up, and stood. "Let's go ho--"

Akane was interrupted when P-chan flew out of her arms and latched onto Ranma's hand.

"Hey, get offa me!"

Ranma shook her hand violently, trying to dislodge P-chan, who was holding on with his teeth. Akane grabbed the piglet and pulled.

"Stop that! Don't bite Ranma!" Akane pulled the piglet loose, and held him up to her face.

"Why are you biting Ranma? BAD, BAD P-chan!"

Ranma's eyes bugged out, and she stared at Akane.

"All the times that pig attacked me and you tell him he's bad now?"

"Well, the other times you deserved it for picking on him!"

Ranma felt it was wiser to keep her mouth shut than to argue the point.

-----

Akane sent Ranma down into the wrecked locker room to search for Ryoga while she stayed outside with P-chan. After a few minutes, he returned alone.

"I can't find him, Akane. He must have gone home."

"I hope he's okay!"

"Oh, I have a feeling he is," Ranma replied.

After Akane got a new uniform from the school and Ranma changed back, they started for home.

The three traveled in silence until they were about halfway there.

"I just want you to know," Akane said, "the only reason I kissed you was because I didn't want to get in trouble."

"I kinda thought it was something like that," Ranma lied. \*It didn't

FEEL that way to me.\*

"But Ranma?"

"Yeah?"

"Thank you for telling me about the map."

The pigtailed martial artist just shrugged. "Didn't have much choice."

"Yes, you did."

"Huh?"

"You could have done something stupid like try to sneak in but you didn't, which I consider a minor miracle for you."

Ranma looked indignant.

"Hey!"

He would have said more, but the soft smile on Akane's face made him stop. The rest of his words died at the beauty of that smile.

"Thank you for trusting me," she whispered.

Their eyes locked, and the distance between them closed. As the space between their lips grew smaller, the air seemed to be charged with electricity.

\*It feels so right,\* Ranma thought as he closed his eyes. \*It feels...\*

CHOMP!

"...like I just got bit!"

"YOWWWCH!!!!"

Ramma glared at the piglet, and was reaching for him when Akane grabbed his arm.

"Don't hurt him, Ranma."

"What?"

"I think he was defending me. He must have thought you were going to hurt me."

"Stupid pig!"

"He's just a pig, Ranma. Don't pick on him. Let's go home."

----- Comments are welcome karaohki@snet.net, and fido@rma.edu

Thank you to everyone who commented on the original post!

www.karaohki.com "Karaoke? Sounds like a dessert." - Wakko "Or a disease." - Dot

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## 5. Default Chapter Title

A Kiss to the Victor

><br>

>A Ranma 12 Fanfic by Hound & Cabbit Productions (David "Fido"

>Lindquist (fido@rma.edu) and June "KaraOhki" Geraci  
(karaohki@snet.net)<br>

>September 11, 2000<br>Revised October 7, 2000

><br>Ranma 1/2 was created by Rumiko Takahashi. We're just borrowing her characters for a little while.

><br>Earlier chapters can be read at

><http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/rothko/228>, or [www.karaohki.com](http://www.karaohki.com)

><br>

><br>

>Chapter 5<br>

>Nabiki stared at the telephone as if there was something wrong with it.<br>

>"Ranma and Akane were WHAT? You've got to be kidding!"<br>

>Nabiki's mind was reeling as the student told her what had happened in the girl's locker room. Once she had heard the whole story, the middle Tendo daughter mumbled a good-bye and hung up the phone. <br>

>\*Ranma and my sister kissing is strange enough but in the girl's locker room?!? Have they lost their minds?!?\*<br>

>\*How many times have they kissed?\* Nabiki wondered. \*I know I caught them during the play--could Ranma possibly be that good a kisser?\* Then the full scope of what all this meant came to her...and she smiled.<br>

>\*This is it! THE mother lode!\* her smile widened. \*They are mine!\*<br>

>The very idea of having Ranma under her complete control made her giddy. She'd never experienced such a feeling of power before. Her mind had already started to calculate how much she could make selling pictures of the two of them to Kuno, not to mention the pure profit the pictures of Ranma's male half would bring in when she sold them to the girls at school.<br>

>\*Wait a second! I could sell HIM too! 'Buy a date with the best-looking hunk at school!'\* Then she stopped and her eyes widened.

\*Why stop there? The girls can buy dates with Ranma, and Kuno would SURE love buying a date with his pigtailed princess!\*<br>

>Yen signs practically danced in her head as she thought of it.

The<br>dancing yen stopped when she felt a very slight pang of guilt, which

>she quickly suppressed. This was not the time to think of guilt.<br>

>She was brought back to the present when she heard the voices of her intended victims as they arrived in the house. Ranma and Akane were walking up the stairs, and she could hear their conversation.<br>

>"Ranma, please don't be angry at P-chan. He was just trying to<br>protect me!"

><br>"That's what you said before! I was only trying to kis--mmph!"

><br>Nabiki strained to hear what Akane was saying.

><br>"Watch what you say! What if someone heard?"

><br>\*Too late, little sister,\* Nabiki thought. \*Far too late!\*

><br>-----

><br>"See you later, Akane."

><br>P-chan growled slightly as Ranma went into his room. Ryoga was

>still angry that his nemesis had tried to kiss her in front of him.

<br>

>"Quit that, P-chan!" Akane said as she walked over and entered<br>her room. "You are going to have to learn not to growl at Ranma!"

><br>P-chan frowned as Akane set him on her bed. \*She never yelled

>at me before! Damn you Ranma! You deny me happiness even as a pig!\*<br>

>He was so caught up in his self-pity that he didn't notice Akane<br>undressing until she was in her underwear.

><br>The piglet started to turn away when he saw Akane open a drawer and pull out a bra and pair of panties.

><br>\*She's going to change her underwear? If Ranma finds out he'll

>KILL me!\*<br>

>"P-chan, where are you going?" Akane dropped the lingerie on the<br>bed and reached for her pet, but he had already jumped out of her window. Ryoga could hear her as he landed and scooted away.

><br>"P-chan, come back!"

><br>\*I'm sorry, Akane, but this is for your own good.\*

><br>After a few minutes of running, he stopped and tried to get his

>bearings.<br>

>"How in the hell did I end up at a shrine? Wait a minute--I've been here before. That crazy redheaded woman lives here!\*<br>

>P-chan's thoughts were interrupted by a frighteningly familiar voice.<br>

>"Little pig, you're back! Come down to my lab and I'll get you some hot water. I really need to research your...condition."<br>

>P-chan just sobbed. <br>

><br>-----

><br>Ranma lay on his futon and stared at the ceiling. His usual trip to the roof was aborted when he heard Akane yelling for P-chan. That meant Ryoga was outside somewhere, and Ranma did NOT want to see him at that particular moment, especially since Ryoga was very much on his mind.

><br>\*I wish he would just stay lost! I'm not gonna put up with him biting me every time I get close to Akane!\*

><br>That forced Ranma to finally confront the question that had been floating beneath the surface of his mind.

><br>\*How would everyone react if they found out we're getting close?\*

><br>The scenario Ranma pictured wasn't a good one. First off, Ryoga and Kuno would try to kill him. That didn't worry him much. The heir of Anything Goes Martial Arts had proven on more than one occasion that he could beat both of them senseless. Of course, that didn't mean he actually wanted them to attack him all the time, but if push came to shove, Ranma could handle it.

><br>The second problem would be their fathers. There was no doubt in

>Ranma's mind that they would have a wedding ready within minutes<br>of finding out, and even if they did figure out a way to postpone it, he had a feeling that they wouldn't take 'No!' as an answer for long.

><br>However, it was the third problem that worried him the most. Shampoo. There was no doubt in Ranma's mind that Shampoo's first reaction would be to try to kill Akane. The main problem was that the Amazon was very capable of doing it. Even worse was the fact that Akane wouldn't admit that she couldn't beat Shampoo on her best day.

><br>That meant Ranma would have to protect her. While Ranma could >beat Shampoo, he also knew she would be relentless in her efforts to kill Akane. He'd have to be with her constantly to ensure her safety.<br>

>\*Could I protect her all the time?\* he thought, then he frowned.  
\*Hell, if I tried we might as well BE married!\*<br>

>Ranma sighed.<br>

>\*I have two choices, try keeping it a secret or,\* he swallowed a lump<br>that formed in his throat, \*not try at all.\*

><br>Ranma's thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. He got up and slid it open. Nabiki didn't wait for an invitation, but walked in and took a seat on the floor. Ranma eyed her suspiciously.

><br>"What do you want?"

><br>"What do I want?" Nabiki replied. "Ranma, I'm hurt! Can't I come and chat with my sister's fiance for no reason at all?"

><br>The smile on her face sent a chill up Ranma's spine.

><br>\*What is she up to?\* he wondered. \*She HAS to be up to something.\*

><br>Nabiki tried to look innocent, but Ranma wasn't fooled. Not this time.

><br>"So, how's it going?" When Ranma said nothing, she continued.

"It

>was a lovely day today. Is that why you ditched school?"<br>

>"Umm....yeah!" he stammered out.<br>

>Nabiki sighed wistfully. "It REALLY must be nice to roam around<br>Nerima all day with Ryoga, isn't it?"

><br>"Ryoga? H-how did you know...?" The rest of the sentence froze in

>Ranma's mouth as a terrible sinking feeling formed in his stomach.

\*Maybe she...\* The color drained out of his face as he stared at her. Nabiki's smile seemed to widen in contrast.<br>

>\*Oh NO!\* he thought. \*She knows!\*<br>

>"So, lover boy, have anything to say about this afternoon?"<br>

>"Urk!"<br>

>"Very descriptive...I'm glad I got my information from the girls in<br>Akane's class. They had a LOT more to say."

><br>Ranma tried to remember how much money he had stashed away in

his hidey-hole. His frozen brain refused to respond. In any case, it

>evidently wouldn't be enough.<br>

>-----<br>

>Akane stood with her ear pressed against Ranma's door. It was a good thing she'd decided to listen in on Ranma and Nabiki instead of knocking and getting Ranma to help her find P-chan. She and Ranma were in trouble, unless she could think of a way to defuse the situation.<br>

>Akane thought hard. Nabiki always managed to have the upper hand over people, especially Ranma. That was the scary thing about her sister. She rarely lost her cool, and she always knew all the angles.<br>

>Akane mentally kicked herself. She should have seen this coming.<br>

>\*What are we going to do?\* she wondered. \*She's holding this over our heads, and we don't have any way to strike back. We don't have anything on HER! Nabiki always covers her tracks too well.\* Then something clicked.<br>

>Akane could hear Ranma stuttering on the other side of the door, and realized that she had minutes, if not seconds, before he'd agree to anything her sister demanded. Akane backed away from Ranma's door and hurried downstairs. She had an idea, but very little time to put it into action.<br>

>Seconds later she was in her room, searching through an old photograph album. A cry of triumph nearly escaped her when she found what she was looking for.<br>

>\*Hang on, Ranma. I'm coming!\*<br>

>-----<br>

>"Um, I don't have much...I mean..."<br>

>Nabiki smiled as she watched Ranma squirm. This was much more fun than she'd anticipated.<br>

>"Who's asking for money, Ranma? I'd much, much rather have your<br>services."

><br>"S-services?" Nabiki didn't think it was possible, but Ranma looked

>even more frightened. "What do you want?"<br>

>"First? I'd say a little photo shoot is in order. After some cold<br>water, of course." When Ranma just sat there, Nabiki took that as

>agreement and continued. "Then you can help me persuade Akane to pose for me. I've got plenty of buyers for photos of the two of you."<br>

>Ranma continued to stay silent, and Nabiki began to see little piles<br>of money floating in front of her eyes. They were even bigger than

>the ones she had imagined earlier.<br>

>"Now take off your shirt, dear. I want to take a couple of beefcake<br>photos while I'm here."

><br>Nabiki pulled a camera out of her pocket and waved impatiently at

>Ranma.<br>

>"No," he said.<br>

>Reality seemed to crash in on Nabiki at the word.<br>

>"Excuse me?"<br>

>"I said no!" he barked out. "You ain't draggin' Akane into this!"<br>

>Nabiki smirked. "Now Ranma, you really don't want me telling Father and Mr. Saotome about this, do you?"<br>

>The look of anger on Ranma's face made Nabiki's smile disappear, and

she began to wonder if she'd pushed things too far. But before anything else happened the door slid open and Akane came in.<br>

>"You're not making us do anything, Nabiki!"<br>

>Nabiki's smile returned. \*Little sister, you don't get it, do you?\* "Suppose I tell Daddy and Mr. Saotome what I heard today? We can hold a wedding tomorrow!"<br>

>Akane blocked the doorway. "No you won't. Not unless you want this distributed to everyone at school. If people are busy laughing at this, it might be difficult to make them take you seriously."<br>

>Nabiki took the photo from Akane. She took one look at it and immediately turned white.<br>

>-----<br>

>Ranma tried to control his anger. He was having a difficult time<br>reminding himself that Nabiki wasn't a martial artist, and he couldn't

>hit her. Then Akane came in, and somehow turned the tables. Ranma reached for the photo.<br>

>"Hey, let me see that!"<br>

>"NO!!!"<br>

>Nabiki tried to pull her hand behind her back, but Ranma was too fast for her. He grabbed the photo and looked at it. Seconds later he was on the floor, laughing so hard that he had to hold his stomach. Nabiki tried desperately to pry the picture out of his fingers, but was unsuccessful.<br>

>Ranma took another look, and dissolved into laughter again.<br>

>The picture showed a two year old Nabiki, enjoying a chocolate-covered cookie. She had the cookie stuffed into her mouth and another in her hand. She was also covered in chocolate from head to toe. But the funniest thing about the photo was that Nabiki was stark naked.<br>

>Ranma looked at his fiancee, who was also giggling.<br>

>"Akane, I don't know how you thought of this, but it's perfect!"<br>

>Before Akane could respond, Nabiki ran between them and out of the room. Ranma was surprised at the action, but Akane just smiled and waved him over. He got up and they both headed for Akane's room, where they found Nabiki frantically tearing through the pages of the album.<br>

>"Where's that negative!"<br>

>Akane folded her arms, looking completely confident.<br>

>"Where you'll never find it, Sis. Give up. You won't win this fight."<br>

>Nabiki looked at her sister. "I want the negative, Akane! Now!"<br>

>"Not likely," came Akane's reply. "I am sick and tired of you<br>constantly using me and Ranma and I think it's going to stop. Now."

><br>Nabiki's expression became that of total innocence. "I...I can't

>believe you would resort to blackmail. I'm shocked! I'm appalled."<br>

>"You're also overacting," Akane responded.<br>

>That was enough to make Ranma start laughing again. He barely noticed Nabiki's expression harden.<br>

>"I'm glad the two of you think that's so funny! I don't!" She turned<br>on her heel and left the room, slamming the door behind her.

><br>-----  
><br>Nabiki's departure allowed Akane to release the breath she'd been holding. She had come very close to losing her composure and totally breaking down.  
><br>Ranma was still chuckling somewhat, then he stopped.

><br>"Akane," he said, "do you think that'll keep her from telling them?"  
><br>Akane nodded. "Yes. For now." She shivered. "I took a chance with that picture. I-I was scared it wasn't going to work."

><br>"Are you okay, Akane?"  
><br>Akane stared at Ranma as if he was insane. "Okay? I just blackmailed my sister! Of course I'm not okay!" she almost shouted.

><br>Akane looked like she wanted to cry, which was the last thing Ranma wanted her to do.  
><br>\*I need to get her mind off of this!\* he thought. \*Well, I guess now  
>is as good a time as any to talk with her...but not here.\*<br>

>Akane didn't seem to notice as he walked up to her. "Come on," he<br>said. "There's a place I want to show you."  
><br>"Wha--?"  
><br>Before Akane could say anything more, Ranma grabbed her around the waist and draped her over his shoulder.  
><br>"Ranma! W-what are you doing?"  
><br>"Akane, just trust me. Okay?" He felt Akane tense up as he walked  
over to her window and opened it.<br>  
>"Ranma--why did you...? RANMA, DON'T YOU DARE!!"<br>  
>Just as Akane finished yelling, Ranma leaped out of her window and onto a nearby tree limb. Using it as a springboard, he rebounded up and landed on the roof.<br>  
>Akane caught her breath as Ranma landed, and he set her down on the roof. He nearly laughed at her confused, frightened expression. "You brought me up to the roof? You scared me to death to bring me to MY OWN ROOF!?"<br>  
>"Umm...yeah," he replied sheepishly. "I do all my thinking here and I<br>thought you'd like to see it."  
><br>-----  
><br>Akane couldn't believe what Ranma had just said. He had scared her half to death just to show her own roof!  
><br>\*It's not like I haven't been here before!\* She was strongly considering knocking Ranma into orbit when she noticed the look on his face. Despite her growing feelings for her fiance, Akane still had a tendency to think the worst about him. She expected his usual "I'm so good I even amaze myself" grin on his face. Instead, there was a nervous expression. It then dawned on her what he had said.<br>  
>"I knew you come up here," she blurted out, "but I never imagined you actually think!" <br>  
>Akane wanted to bite her tongue when she saw the glimmer of pain flash over Ranma's face, then disappear into a stony expression.<br>  
>"Forget it," Ranma said in a slightly angry tone. "Sorry I bothered<br>you."  
><br>Ranma turned to leave but stopped when Akane grabbed his arm.

><br>"I...I'm sorry, Ranma," Akane pleaded. She moved her hand to his and gripped it. "Nabiki has me so upset I can't think straight."

><br>She watched his face return to its previous nervous look.

><br>"O-okay."

><br>-----

><br>Ranma walked to the center of the roof, sat down, and gestured for Akane to join him. As she came over, Ranma thought about what he was going to say.

><br>\*I have to do this right! If I screw this up she'll never forgive me!\*

><br>Akane bit her lip nervously as she sat beside Ranma.

><br>\*I can't screw up like that again. I nearly drove him away.\*

><br>Ranma sat there for a few minutes, quietly trying to figure out what to say. He could feel the tension building as Akane waited for him to speak. Finally, he took a deep breath and began.

><br>"Nice day, isn't it?"

><br>Akane just stared at him. "What???"

><br>"That's not what I wanted to say!"

><br>Ranma watched as Akane opened her mouth, closed it again, and clenched her fists. "I didn't think so," she replied. "Want to try again?"

><br>"I'm not sure where to start, Akane."

><br>"Try the beginning?"

><br>"I w-was thinking. If you and me...I mean...if we were a c-couple, it would be kinda hard to do it openly. I mean...our fathers would be trying to get us married the moment they found out."

><br>Akane looked thoughtful. "You're probably right. Look how Nabiki tried to hold that over our heads. B-but why are you telling me this?"

><br>Ranma shrugged. "I-I just got to thinking about it, that's all," he replied.

><br>"Well, I guess if we did decide to be a couple, we'd have to keep it a secret," Akane said, then hastily added "that is IF we were going to be a couple."

><br>"That's what I was thinking," Ranma said, "but do we want to be a couple?"

><br>Time seemed to freeze as the words hung in the air. Akane looked at Ranma.

><br>"Oh, Ranma...I--"

><br>"Dinner's ready!" Kasumi's voice shattered the mood.

><br>Ranma fidgeted for a few seconds as he stared at his hands. Then he looked up at Akane. "I guess we'd better go to dinner."

><br>"Y-yeah," Akane replied. As Ranma and Akane climbed off the roof, the pigtailed martial artist noticed that Akane had stopped.

><br>"Oh no! I forgot about P-chan!"

><br>"Oh yeah," Ranma said. "Why did the piglet jump out of the window anyway?"

><br>"I don't know. I was in the middle of changing clothes and he just ran off!"

><br>\*So, Ryoga's keeping his word,\* Ranma thought. \*Good.\*

><br>"I wouldn't worry about him, Akane. P-chan is good at taking care of himself, y'know."

><br>-----

><br>The next day found Kodachi smiling very happily in Home Economics class.

><br>"The cookies smell wonderful," she said aloud as she pulled them from the oven. "These will be perfect for my Ranma!"

><br>She then let out a short laugh. "Ohoho! Once Ranma tastes these cookies, he will be speechless!" she said, and then thought \*And motionless as well!\*

><br>The thought of drugging her love dampened her good mood a little. \*Oh Ranma, if only you would admit your true feelings for me, I could take care of your "problem" easily!\* Visions of her killing Akane in every way imaginable flooded her mind.

><br>"Did you hear about what happened at Furinkan?"

><br>Kodachi was jolted out of her daydream. "Whatever are you talking about?"

><br>"The ladies' locker room blew up!"

><br>"Was anyone hurt?" she asked, secretly hoping that Akane Tendo was in the locker room at the time.

><br>"Nobody got hurt, but it's just TOO bad that nobody got a picture of that last good thing that happened in there."

><br>Kodachi looked down her nose at the girl who was speaking. She couldn't recall her name, but only that she had recently switched to St. Hebereke's from Furinkan High.

><br>"And what would that be?"

><br>"Akane Tendo had her fiance in there and they were kissing!"

><br>The other girls in the room began to back away. The recent transfer student looked rather surprised at their reaction, but remained where she was.

><br>The gymnastic martial artist didn't move, and her face showed only a fraction of the horror she felt inside. \*That peasant kissed Ranma???

><br>The words rolled around in her mind. \*Ranma had been kissed by a peasant? No, he wouldn't do that willingly. She must have...\*

><br>"No," Kodachi whispered as her eyes grew wide. Then she shouted "NO! My-my poor helpless Ranma!"

> <br>Instantly, a spotlight flashed onto the gymnast and she pulled a microphone out of the air. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she began to speak.

><br>"My poor Ranma! To be dragged into the women's locker room--a place dedicated to the fairer sex--and to be FORCED into debauchery by that...that tramp!" Kodachi screeched. "I will NOT permit it! Teacher, I must leave to save my Ranma!" Before the teacher could reply, Kodachi was gone, leaving the air filled with black rose petals.

><br>"Oh, great," one of the students complained. "I hate having to clean those up!"

><br>-----

><br>"Achoo!" Akane scratched her nose. \*There must be too much flour in the air.\* She opened the oven door, put the cookies in, and re-checked the temperature. \*This batch of cookies is going to be perfect. I followed my teacher's instructions exactly!\*

><br>Akane thought about the way Ranma usually reacted to her cooking.

><br>\*Maybe, just maybe Ranma will try them.\*

><br>-----

><br>\*Stupid teachers!\* Ranma thought as he put away the last of the books. \*I had a good excuse for skipping school yesterday and they still punish me!\* He let out a sigh.

><br>"At least that's done," he muttered.

><br>\*I'm starved. Wonder if Akane wants to have lunch with me.\*

>With that thought, Ranma headed toward the Home Ec room to ask her. When he got there, Ranma couldn't get near the room. A huge crowd of boys blocked the hallway.<br>

>"What's going on?" Ranma asked.<br>

>"The girls are baking cookies!" one of the guys said. "We're waiting to get some of them!"<br>

>Ranma shuddered. \*I gotta get out of here before Akane finds me.\* He turned, and stopped when he saw Kuno, wearing a piyo piyo bib and carrying a knife and fork, standing in his way.<br>

>"Out of my way, foul knave! I must be the first in line to sample the wondrous cookies baked by the fair Akane!"<br>

>Kuno's words made Ranma pause. A part of him wanted to get away from Akane's cooking, but another part didn't want Kuno getting the cookies, even if he was 100 percent certain that they would make him sick as a dog for a week.<br>

>"Trust me, Kuno," Ranma replied. "You don't want the cookies Akane is making--not unless you like being sick."<br>

>It was obvious to everyone in the hallway that Kuno was furious. The smarter students began to back away. Being in the middle of a fight between Ranma and Kuno wasn't their idea of fun. The fight, however, never happened.<br>

>-----<br>

>Every head in the Home Ec room turned toward the sound of the crash. Akane was the first to identify the intruder coming through the window, and she was NOT happy to see her.<br>

>"Kodachi! What are YOU doing here?<br>

>Kodachi finished brushing the little pieces of glass from her leotard and glared at Akane.<br>

>"I have come to free my Ranma from your perverted ways!"<br>

>"MY PERVERTED WAYS???" Akane screeched. \*She thinks I'M a pervert?!\*<br>

>Akane noticed that the other girls began a quick retreat out into the hallway, but were stopped by the guys trying to come in to see what was going on. Two boys were trying especially hard to get in, namely Ranma and Kuno.<br>

>Their reactions were completely different when they saw the scene in front of them.<br>

>"Sister, what are you doing here?" asked Kuno.<br>

>Ranma looked at Akane. She appeared to be unhurt. "Akane! Are you okay?"<br>

>Neither girl responded.<br>

>"Did you not drag my poor, helpless Ranma into the women's locker room?" Kodachi asked Akane.<br>

>Images of the locker room kiss passed through Akane's mind. She smiled inwardly as she relived it, but quickly pushed the feelings aside. Akane couldn't deny Kodachi's accusation, because people would want to know what really happened. She struggled to find a way to respond.<br>

>"Well....I...." Akane stammered.<br>

>"Who are you calling helpless?" yelled Ranma. Again, neither of the girls paid any attention to him.<br>

>"Now I am here to rescue him and end this unwanted 'engagement' once and for all!"<br>

>\*Oh, NO you won't!\* Akane thought, as she prepared for an attack.

"So, you want another beating?" she asked confidently, her confusion gone. "Fine by me!"<br>

>"Beating? Ohohohoho! I have no intention of stooping to your level,"

the gymnast sneered. "Akane Tendo, I formally challenge you to a martial arts gymnastic match for the hand of Ranma Saotome!"<br>

>"WHAT?!" shouted practically everyone in the room.<br>

>" I said, 'I, Kodachi Kuno, challenge Akane Tendo to a martial arts gymnastics match.' Are all of you deaf?"<br>

>"Get real, Kodachi," Akane responded. "We've been through this before. You lost, and you kept that oath for a total of two seconds!"<br>

>Akane watched with satisfaction as Kodachi's face turned bright red. \*Good, I got to her.\* She tensed, expecting Kodachi to attack, but her rival took a step back, and it was obvious to Akane that Kodachi was struggling hard to hold onto her temper. <br>

>After a few seconds, Kodachi was in enough control to answer. She smiled at Akane, a smile that made her skin crawl, and offered another option.<br>

>"Suppose we make the prize something more...physical." <br>

>"What!?!?" Akane heard Ranma say. <br>

>She took a quick glance at him and saw most of the other boys trying to stop their noses from bleeding. Ranma, however, just stood there with his mouth hanging open. Then she turned her complete attention back to Kodachi.<br>

>"Exactly what do you mean by physical?" demanded Akane.<br>

>"Can't you guess? My darling Ranma will give a kiss to the victor! And when I win, he will know how a true woman's lips should feel!"<br>

>Ranma tried to say something, but all Akane could see was his mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water.<br>

>\*Which he is,\* she thought. \*Now you see what I go through!\*<br>

>This only served to make Akane angrier at Kodachi. She wanted to pound the smug look off Kodachi's face. She exerted every bit of self-control to keep herself from doing just that.<br>

>"Fine!" she growled.<br>

>"We will hold it in a week at St. Hebereke's gym."<br>

>Ranma finally found his voice. "Wait a second!" he shouted. "I never said I'D be the prize!"<br>

>"No way, Kodachi!" Akane objected, completely ignoring her fiance. "We'll hold it here, where it'll be harder for you to cheat!"<br>

>"I do not cheat!" Kodachi replied "but it is acceptable." The tone of her voice, and the fact that she spoke through clenched teeth, made it clear that she wasn't happy about it. <br>

>"Hey! Wait a sec!" Ranma yelled.<br>

>"Now I must be off! I have a victory party to plan!" Kodachi cackled. The Black Rose turned and walked to the opening she had made before. "Farewell, darling Ranma!"<br>

>The look of fury on his face was enough to make Akane wince. <br>

>"Oh, and Akane?" Kodachi continued. "This time, no matter what the excuse, no substitutes."<br>

>Akane growled deep in her throat. "Don't worry. I'll be there."<br>

>"That," Kodachi quipped as she leaped through the hole, "remains to be seen."<br>

>"Hold on! Kodachi! I didn't...." Ranma's voice trailed off at the disappearance of Kodachi. "...agree...to...this? Oh, man..."<br>

>The rage Akane felt lingered, despite Kodachi's departure. \*How DARE she? I'm gonna rip her apart!!!\*<br>

>"Akane! Why did you agree to that?" Ranma asked angrily. "I ain't some kinda prize in a contest, you know!"<br>

>"Now you know how I feel! Why do you think I get so mad--" The rest of her sentence was cut off when she smelled something burning. "Oh no!" Her argument with Ranma forgotten, Akane turned around and ran for the stove. When she opened the oven door, black smoke billowed out. "MY COOKIES!!!" <br>

>Akane was holding a pan of what looked like pieces of coal when Ranma approached her.<br>

>"Sorry about your cookies," Ranma blurted out. "But at least now they look uneatable too!"<br>

>The next thing Akane knew, the cookies were on the floor and Ranma was flying through the roof.<br>

>"Ranma, you idiot!"<br>

>-----<br>

>\*Well, that was a stupid thing to say,\* Ranma thought as he was sailing through the air. \*I shoulda known better than to say that, even if it was true!\*<br>

>He hit the ground, rolled a couple of times, and stopped. Ranma got up, dusted himself off, and started the long walk back to school.<br>

>"She's getting stronger. This is the farthest I've even flown!"<br>

>\*I'd better get back to school. I have to get it through Akane's head that I'm NOT gonna be a prize!\*<br>

>Ranma ran back to the school, trying to figure out how he was going to tell Akane that without having to take another unwanted long-distance trip.<br>

>-----<br>

>As Akane placed the scorched tray into the sink, she frowned.<br>

>\*Darn that Kodachi! She ruined it!\* Then she smiled evilly. \*Well, she'll get what's coming to her when we fight!\*<br>

>Akane imagined the gym filled with her friends, all of them cheering as she clobbered the Kuno girl. Then she stopped short.<br>

>"Oh no!" she cried aloud. "We need the coach's permission to hold the match here!"<br>

>Akane left the dirty dishes in the sink and took off for the gym.<br>

>-----<br>

>The sound of running footsteps echoed through the hallway.<br>

>\*I hope I catch Akane before she talks to the teacher,\* Ranma thought. \*Otherwise, I'm stuck!\*<br>

>The martial artist turned the corner and had to jump out of the way to miss colliding with his fiancee. "Hey, watch it!" he shouted, as he regained his balance.<br>

>"Watch it yourself!" Akane yelled back. "I've got to get to Ms. Kitami's office before she starts her next class."<br>

>"Akane, we need to talk about--" responded Ranma. Before he could say anything else, he felt Akane grab his collar and drag him towards the coach's office. "Hey! Leggo!"<br>

>"No time!" Akane shouted back as she increased her speed.<br>

>-----<br>

>Akane and Ranma arrived at the gym teacher's office just as Ms. Kitami was leaving.<br>

>"Hello, Ms. Kitami," Akane said as she bowed. <br>

>"Hello...Akane, isn't it?"<br>  
>"Yes, Teacher," she said.<br>  
>"And this is your fiance, I assume?"<br>  
>Ranma had just finished straightening his clothes when he heard the question.<br>  
>"Yep! That's me!"<br>  
>His directness took Akane by surprise, and instantly made her blush.<br>  
>"So, what brings you here?" Ms. Kitami asked.<br>  
>"Ummmm...we needed to ask you a favor," Akane stammered out as she tried to regain her composure.<br>  
>Ms. Kitami raised one eyebrow. "Oh, what would that be? I was going to lunch," she continued. "Why don't you walk with me and we'll talk on the way."<br>  
>The three set off down the hallway, but after walking a few feet Ranma grabbed Akane's arm and forced her to slow down. <br>  
  
>"Dammit, Akane! I never agreed to this!"<br>  
>Akane looked guilty for a second. \*Ranma's right, but it's too late. I've already committed myself to this match!\* "I'm sorry Ranma, but I can't back out now! I'd look like a coward!"<br>  
>Ranma looked like he was going to protest, but then Akane saw him slowly deflate.<br>  
>"Yeah, yeah," he muttered. "But I still don't like it!"<br>  
>Ms. Kitami walked ahead, not speaking at all. After their whispered exchange, Ranma and Akane followed behind until they turned the corner to the cafeteria. Then Akane got up the courage to speak.<br>  
  
>"Ms. Kitami," she said. "We need to ask you if we could set up a gymnastics meet here next week."<br>  
>The teacher looked surprised at the request, then her face became emotionless. "Come here, Miss Tendo," she said. "I have something to show you," she said coolly.<br>  
>They walked in silence. Each step seemed to Akane as if she and Ranma were walking to their executions, rather than to the cafeteria. The fact that the other students were scurrying away from them and giving her and Ranma looks of total pity wasn't helping any. She then noticed that her fiance was also somewhat nervous. Akane found herself standing with Ranma in front of Furinkan High's trophy case. Akane smiled slightly at all the ribbons and trophies that lined it. She'd had a part in winning some of them, and couldn't help but be a little proud of her achievements.<br>  
>"Do you see these?" Ms. Kitami asked. Her angry tone of voice made Akane's pride seem unimportant.<br>  
>Akane looked where the teacher was pointing. There was a row of gymnastics awards, quite an impressive one, but none of them were for first place.<br>  
>"These are the results of countless hours of training by students who dedicate themselves to the sport of Martial Arts Gymnastics."<br>  
  
>"Yes, Ma'am," said Akane, wondering what was coming next.<br>  
  
>"They gave their blood, sweat and tears to win those," the teacher continued, completely ignoring Akane, "and if it weren't for that evil, vile blight on the gymnastics world, Kodachi Kuno, they would be FIRST PLACE!"<br>  
>"Eep!"<br>  
>Akane and Ranma both jumped at the shout. They stared in horror as Ms. Kitami, the nice, quiet, demure teacher they had been talking to, performed a perfect demon-head attack.<br>

>Despite his apparent surprise, Akane found that Ranma had stepped in front of her.<br>

>"WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU SHOULD STEP INTO SUCH HALLOWED GROUNDS?" Ms. Kitami roared.<br>

>"Because Kodachi Kuno challenged Akane to a martial arts gymnastics fight!" Ranma retorted.<br>

>At the words "Kodachi Kuno," the demon head's right eye began to twitch.<br>

>"SHE IS GOING TO FIGHT KODACHI KUNO?!"<br>

>"Umm--yeah?" Akane responded as she peeked over Ranma's shoulder, unsure of whether she should stay or run.<br>

>The demon head disappeared, and they saw the confused yet somewhat hopeful look on her face. "C-could you be the one? The one that finally defeats that evil villainess and restores the honor of Furinkan High School?"<br>

>"Ahh..."<br>

>"You bet she will!" interrupted Ranma.<br>

>Akane's eyes bulged out as she heard Ranma's words. \*He actually has faith in me? He actually thinks I can beat her?\* Akane smiled, almost lost in her own dream world, as she tried to concentrate on what the teacher was saying.<br>

>"Yes! You are the one! You have to be! Oh, how I've dreamed of having Kodachi Kuno know the feeling of defeat!"<br>

>"Hey! She's been beaten before!" Ranma said.<br>

>"Yes, but she was beaten by a stranger, not one of Furinkan's own!"<br>

>"What??" Ranma shouted, but was drowned out by the teacher's rambling.<br>

>"But now--NOW we have a chance for redemption! A chance to remove the blotch that has tainted our lives for so very long...a chance to be free! Free forever!!!"<br>

>"Umm..." both Ranma and Akane said as they slowly backed away from Ms. Kitami.<br>

>"S-so," Akane finally said. "Do we get to use the gymnastic ring?"<br>

>"I don't know."<br>

>There was a collective THUD as every student and teacher within earshot, including Ranma and Akane, fell over.<br>

>"Drop by my office after school and I'll let you know then. I don't foresee any problems, but I have to make sure."<br>

>"Th-thank you," Akane replied as she got off the floor.<br>

>"Talk to you later!" Ms. Kitami said cheerfully as she entered the lunchroom.<br>

>The pair stared as she walked off. Once she was out of sight, Ranma spoke.<br>

>"That is a strange woman."<br>

>Akane found herself in total agreement.<br>

>The two martial artists turned and walked back towards their classroom, neither of them saying a word. They were almost there when Ranma broke the silence.<br>

>"Akane, I'm sorry for what I said about your cooking. It was just pure reflex."<br>

>Akane frowned slightly. She had almost forgotten about the incident.<br>

>"Well, you should at least give me a chance!" she muttered. She noticed that Ranma's face now had a frown on it. He also appeared to be very uncomfortable about something. <br>

>"Ranma?"<br>

>-----<br>

>\*What am I gonna do?\* the pigtailed martial artist as she stared at

his fiancee. \*I can't tell her she couldn't boil water to save her life, but I do NOT want to eat any of her cooking either!\* He pondered the problem for a few seconds until he was interrupted by Akane's voice.<br>

>"Ranma?"<br>

>"C'mon, it's lunch time!" he said quickly. "Let's go eat!"<br>

><br>With that remark, Ranma grabbed Akane by the hand and dragged her the rest of the way before she could say anything. \*I'll figure this out later,\* he thought. \*I hope.\*

><br>-----

><br>The rest of the day passed by very quickly. However, after the excitement had died down, Ranma's confidence in Akane began to waver, and despite his show of support for her, he was having second thoughts.

><br>\*Kodachi is good,\* Ranma thought as he glanced at Akane. \*In a straight fight Akane could beat her, but in a martial arts gymnastic match she doesn't stand much of a chance.\* The mental image of Akane wrapped up in her own ribbon made him shudder. \*But she was getting a little better before she twisted her ankle.\*

><br>Ranma shifted in his chair and took another look at Akane. \*Oh, man...we are in trouble!\*

><br>-----

><br>Akane sat at her desk and frowned. She had a week to train for her fight. For just a moment, she wished Ryoga was around so she could learn from him, but then she changed her mind. Considering the way Ryoga and Ranma got along, they would probably spend more time fighting each other than helping her train.

><br>\*I wish Ms. Kitami could have said yes instead of making us wait.\* She sighed, then glanced over at Ranma. For the first time since the challenge, doubts began nagging at her.

><br>\*Can I beat Kodachi? Sure, I can take her in a fight but she almost beat Ranma in one of those matches!\*

><br>The Tendo girl turned and looked at her fiance. She immediately felt a hardened sense of determination rise in her.

><br>\*I've GOT to defeat her,\* she thought. \*She isn't going to touch my Ranma!\* The ferocity of the thought shocked Akane, but only for a moment. Her anger was replaced by a sense of warmth.

><br>\*MY Ranma...I like that!\*

><br>-----

><br>The end of the school day found Ranma and Akane standing in front of the gym. They could already hear the sounds of the gymnastics team working out.

><br>"So, you wanna go in first?" asked Ranma.

><br>Akane shrugged, then opened the doors and walked in with Ranma tagging along behind. All of the girls stopped what they were doing when they saw them, and the captain of the team, a tall girl named Mayuri, immediately came forward to greet them.

><br>"Hi, Akane!" she said. "You're here about the match?

><br>"Yes," Akane replied, her voice sounding high and nervous. "How did you know about it?"

><br>"Ms. Kitami told us. Besides that, everybody in the school is talking about the 'Kiss to the Victor' match."

><br>Akane blanched at Mayuri's words, and one look at Ranma told her that he didn't like it either.

><br>"Do you think we'll get permission to use the gym?"

><br>Mayuri laughed. "I wouldn't worry about that! She'd blackmail the school board to make it happen! Ms. Kitami hates Kodachi so much

that she has a dartboard with her picture on it. She changes the pic every two days."

><br>Akane, Ranma and the team laughed. When their laughter died down, Mayuri looked directly at Akane. "Are you sure you're up to this?"

><br>"Honestly? I don't know," replied Akane. Then she returned Mayuri's gaze with a determined glint in her eyes. "But she's going to have to kill me to stop me from beating her."

><br>"Would you like our help?"

><br>Before either one of them could answer, Ms. Kitami entered the gym. "There she is!" she cried. "The one who will make all our hopes a reality!"

><br>Both Akane and Ranma's faces turned bright red, while Mayuri just shook her head and went back to practicing.

><br>"Everything is set up, Akane," she continued, totally ignoring the looks on their faces. "You will have the gym this Saturday afternoon. Now run along home and practice!" Before either one could say a word, Ms. Kitami was pushing them out the door.

><br>"Go! I don't want you picking up any bad habits from us! It might corrupt you, and make you lose!"

><br>As they were being pushed out the door, Akane looked at the team. She saw Mayuri stop and look back, then wave good bye.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>As the doors swung shut behind them, Ranma waited for Akane to say something. She had the oddest look on her face.

><br>"Something wrong, Akane?"

><br>Akane turned and looked at him. "I have this bad feeling that if I lose, Ms. Kitami is going to have a breakdown."

><br>"Either than or she'll kill you," Ranma replied. "Come on! We have a WHOLE lot of training to do if you are going to stand a chance against her."

><br>"Oh, really?" Akane asked coolly.

><br>"Well...umm...I didn't mean..." Ranma stuttered, not sure why Akane was acting the way she was.

><br>"You know what? I think I'd better start practicing."

><br>"Sure, we'll start--"

><br>"No, Ranma," Akane interrupted as she gripped her bookbag and raised it over her head. "RIGHT NOW!"

><br>"Eep!" Ranma ducked Akane's blow, and began to back away from her. "A bookbag isn't one of the standard weapons!"

><br>"Whatever works! Now stand still and help me train, you pervert!"

><br>Instead of standing still, Ranma fled the grounds of Furinkan High, Akane close behind, still swinging her bookbag. \*Well,\* he thought as he glanced back at her. \*At least she's getting warmed up.\*

><br>

><br>-----

>to be continued<br>

>-----<br>

>Thanks to all the people who gave us C&C, especially SabreBabe, Gary Kleppe, D.F. Roeder, and Diese<br>

>Oh! And we don't own Washu, either!<br>

><br>

A Kiss To The Victor

><br>

>A Ranma 12 Fanfic by Hound & Cabbit Productions

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>Ranma 12 was created by Rumiko Takahashi. We're

>just borrowing her characters for a little while.<br>

>Earlier chapters can be read at<br><http://karaohki.anifics.com>

><br>-----

><br>Chapter Six

><br>"Ranma! Will you cut that out? You said you were

>going to train me, so stop ducking!"<br>

>Ranma just stared at Akane. The way she had her<br>hands on her hips and the half glaring, half

>pleading look in her eyes made the martial artist<br>fidget.

><br>"I...ahh..." she stammered.

><br>"You WHAT? You don't want to hit me? You don't  
hit girls? Well you're a girl yourself right now!<br>What's the  
problem? Don't you want me to win?"

><br>"But--but!!"

><br>Ranma couldn't seem to get her mouth working, and  
she knew she was in trouble when Akane started<br>crying.

><br>"Forget it! You're not helping me at all!"

><br>Akane ran out of the dojo, leaving Ranma standing  
there. The smaller girl sat down on the floor.<br>

>Ranma slapped her palm onto the floor. "Damn it,<br>Akane! Don't you  
get it? I can't hit you!" she

>muttered. "You're my fiancee, it ain't right to<br>hit your  
fiancee." A sigh escaped her lips, and

>she asked herself why these things always seemed<br>to happen to  
her. After a few moments of despair,

>Ranma turned her attention to how she could train<br>Akane. "There's  
gotta be a way..." the rest of her

>sentence was cut off as the solution came to her.<br>"That's it!"

><br>

><br>-----

><br>Akane stretched out in the bath, allowing the hot  
water to ease the tension from her body. Her eyes<br>hurt from  
crying, and she was still angry.

><br>\*Damn, why won't he take me seriously! I need to  
train for this! It's like...\* Akane sniffled<br>again as a lump  
formed in her throat...\*he doesn't

>want me to win.\*<br>

>\*I don't understand. Ranma TOLD me I could win.<br>He told Ms.  
Kitami that I would win. So why isn't

>he helping me train?\*<br>

>She brought her fist down into the water, causing<br>a huge splash.

><br>\*OOH! There are times I want to strangle him!\*

><br>-----

><br>SNAP! The ribbon struck the practice dummy hard,  
tearing a deep gash in the white blouse it wore.<br>The blue jumper  
was already in shreds.

><br>\*Take that, harlot!\* Kodachi thought as she  
>retrieved her ribbon. Beads of sweat dotted her<br>face and she was  
breathing heavily. A few more  
>strikes of her weapon of choice quickly tore<br>pieces out of her  
target's body. Suddenly,  
>Kodachi slashed at the dummy's head. "Soon you<br>will know who  
truly deserves Ranma!" she cried.  
>The blow tore the head from the dummy and it<br>rolled across the  
floor, stopping near Kodachi's  
>feet.<br>  
>However, instead of making the gymnast happy, it<br>made her feel  
uneasy.  
><br>\*Will it be this easy?\* Kodachi wondered as she  
>straightened up. A slight flash of pain from her<br>stomach  
immediately reminded her of their last  
>encounter and the ease at which she had been<br>'dispatched'. Then  
she dismissed her doubts.  
><br>\*No! I am Kodachi Kuno! I will not be beaten by  
that--that peasant!\* She grabbed a towel and<br>wiped her face. \*It  
was a fluke,\* she thought.  
>\*A mere accident allowed Akane to win last time.<br>It won't happen  
twice.\* She put the towel on the  
>bench and laughed softly. "No, I will most<br>definitely not let  
that happen again."  
><br>-----  
><br>Morning in the Tendo house was greeted by an  
>unusual sight: Ranma, fully dressed and ready to<br>leave before  
anyone else. He practically flew  
>down the stairs and continued on around the corner<br>where he found  
Akane right in front of him.  
>"Wha?" was all Ranma could say before he slammed<br>into his  
fiancee, causing her to bounce off the  
>wall. Ranma immediately grabbed her to keep her<br>from ending up on  
the floor.  
><br>"Akane! Are you all right?"  
><br>Akane removed Ranma's hands from her waist and  
>glared at him. "I'm perfectly fine! Why don't<br>you watch where  
you're going?"  
><br>The anger in her voice surprised him.  
><br>\*She can't still be mad, can she?\*  
><br>"A-Akane? What...?" Ranma trailed off, unable to  
>continue his thought. Akane stepped right into<br>the gap.  
><br>"If you can't help me just stay out of my way!"  
><br>Ranma started to follow her, then stopped. It  
>wouldn't do any good to apologize to her now. She<br>was too upset  
to listen.  
><br>\*I hope she likes my idea.\*  
><br>-----  
><br>Akane was only halfway through her breakfast when  
>Ranma left the table, grabbed his books, and ran<br>out of the  
house.  
><br>\*Where is he going in such a hurry?\* she thought.  
>\*Is he avoiding me?\*<br>  
>Akane finished breakfast and started off for<br>school, still  
thinking about Ranma and his refusal  
>to train her. \*This makes no sense at all. He<br>wants me to win,  
but he won't help me. I can't  
>practice without a partner! Why is he so<br>stubborn?\*  
><br>The answer to the question made her stop short.

>\*Ranma won't train with me because he thinks he'll<br>hurt me! All he did was bump into me this morning  
>and he got upset!\*<br>  
>For a moment, this made her get angry. \*I'm not<br>THAT fragile! So now what do I do?  
><br>Then she arrived at school, and had something else  
>to wonder about. Ranma was already there and he<br>was standing with Mayuri, the captain of the  
>gymnastics team. They were smiling and laughing.<br>  
>\*That--that JERK! He's flirting with her! Is<br>that why he left early?  
><br>Akane suppressed the urge to run up to Ranma and  
>pound him into jelly. Instead, she stalked past<br>him and Mayuri, refusing to look at either of  
>them.<br>  
-----<br>  
>"Thanks Mayuri." Ranma said and smiled. "I'll see<br>you later."  
  
><br>"Hey, no problem! It'll be fun! Bye, Ranma!"  
>Mayuri grabbed her bag off the ground and ran into<br>the school.  
  
><br>Ranma watched her go inside and realized that  
>Akane had entered the school just before Mayuri<br>did.  
><br>\*Why didn't she stop and say hello?\* he wondered.  
>\*How long is she gonna stay mad?\*<br>  
>He entered the school and began following Akane to<br>their classroom. \*Well, if this works out, it  
>should cheer her up!\*<br>  
-----<br>  
>Akane stormed past Ranma. She pretended not to<br>notice him at all, but her anger at him was almost  
>palpable. She never even noticed that the rest of<br>the students were giving her a wide berth.  
><br>\*I can't believe him!\* she thought. \*He was  
>coming on to her right in front of me!\*<br>  
>"Akane!" The voice of her source of aggravation<br>barely registered in her head. She didn't notice  
>it until he called out again.<br>  
>"Hey, Akane! Wait up!"<br>  
>She debated ignoring him but decided to see what<br>he wanted. After all, dead men did deserve a last  
>request.<br>  
>"Jeez! Why didn't you wait for me?" he asked.<br>  
>"Why should I? I didn't look like you were going<br>to be done with your new girlfriend any time  
>soon!"<br>  
>"Ya know something, Akane? That has to be one of<br>the dumbest things you've ever said to me." With  
>that remark, Ranma walked past Akane and into the<br>classroom, leaving her standing there with her  
>mouth open.<br>  
-----<br>  
>The morning didn't get any better, and Ranma was<br>relieved when it was over. He was too angry to  
>talk to Akane, and she ignored him.<br>  
>At lunchtime, Ranma walked out into the schoolyard<br>alone.  
  
><br>\*I really can't believe her! Things were going  
>decent and now it's back to the same old crap<br>again!\* He was about to sit down when he heard

>someone call his name. The martial artist turned  
running up to him.

>"Ranma! I'm glad I got hold of you!" she said.

>"What's up?" Ranma's reply lacked some of its  
usual enthusiasm.

>"I talked to the girls and they said it would be  
okay, but we'll need an hour to get there."

>"An hour?!" he gasped. "Oh, great! She's barely  
talking to me and I have to keep her busy for an  
hour?"

>"Sorry, Saotome," she replied. "But that's the  
best we can do."

>"Okay...okay. I gotta think." Ranma stood there  
and tried to figure out what to do.

>"I've got an idea," Mayuri said. "The rumor is  
that she is ticked off at you, right?"

>"Yeah." There was little confidence in Ranma's  
voice.

>"Then take her for ice cream after school! Just  
make sure she doesn't eat too much."

>"Ya gotta be kidding! If I ask her to go with me  
she'll probably pound me!"

>"Do you have a better idea?"

>The pigtailed martial artist slowly hung his head,  
then looked back up and smiled. "Yeah, I think I  
do!"

>"Great! You take care of Akane, and I'll get  
everyone over to the dojo."

>"Okay," Ranma replied. "Now, when you get to the  
dojo, tell Kasumi that you are supposed to meet  
us there, but don't tell anyone where we went."

>"How could I? I don't know where you're going!"

>"Then you don't have to lie to her. Trust me."

>Mayuri just stared at Ranma. "Ooookay," she said  
uncertainly.

>"Perfect! See ya later!" Ranma ran off. \*Now,\* he thought. \*How  
do I do this without getting  
pounded?\*

>-----

>Ranma worried about that all afternoon, and never  
did come up with anything resembling a battle  
plan. \*Aw well,\* he thought. \*I'll just wing it.\* How hard can it  
be?\* The pigtailed martial artist  
chanced a quick glance at Akane. She looked a  
little haggard from their earlier confrontation,  
but the anger of the morning seemed to be gone.  
\*No problem at all.\*

>The last bell rang, and Akane had her things  
gathered together and was out the door before  
Ranma could blink.

>\*I can't let her run home!\* he thought, and  
hurried after her.

>"Akane!"

>Akane turned around and looked at him in a tired  
sort of way. "Ranma, please go away. I have a  
bad enough headache as it is."

>"You're in training, Akane. You can't let a  
little thing like a headache stop you. Let's go!"

>"Why?" demanded Akane. "So you can hop around and  
not help me

train?"

><br>The words hit Ranma hard. \*So, she's still  
>upset,\* he thought. Then Ranma and Akane stared<br>at each other for  
a moment before Ranma broke the  
>silence. "Look, I give you my word that you will<br>have a proper  
training session tonight."

><br>Akane's mouth dropped open. "You really mean it?"  
>she asked breathlessly.<br>

>"I gave you my word, didn't I?" Ranma suddenly<br>found himself on  
the receiving end of a glomp that  
>would have put Shampoo to shame.<br>

>"Thank you, Ranma!" Akane cried, as he felt her<br>tears soak his  
shirt. He suddenly became aware of  
>the fact that a sea of curious faces surrounded<br>him and Akane.  
"C'mon, Akane. Let's get out of  
>here." As he spoke, Ranma grabbed Akane's hand<br>and took off.

><br>-----

><br>\*Where are we going?\* wondered Akane. She had  
assumed that Ranma would take her home to<br>practice, but instead  
he was heading toward the  
shopping district. When he finally slowed down to<br>a walk she was  
slightly out of breath.

><br>"Where are we going, Ranma?"

><br>"There's somethin' I want to get you. In here."

><br>Ranma pulled Akane into a small shop. Numerous  
>knick-knacks lined the shelves. Some of them<br>appeared to be very  
old while others were the  
usual sorts of cheap souvenir seen in shops all<br>over Japan.

><br>"Ranma - "

><br>"There it is!" Ranma pointed at a group of  
strange, round, red dolls that sat on one of the<br>shelves.

><br>"Daruma? You brought me here to see these?"

><br>"Nope! We're going to buy one," Ranma replied.

><br>Akane's annoyance was plain on her face. "What  
for?"<br>

>"To help you succeed in your training, of course!"<br>

>Akane held in the urge to laugh at him. "Don't<br>tell me you  
believe in that stuff! It's a myth!"

><br>Ranma just looked at her. "Yeah. And so are  
water-based curses."<br>

>Akane stared at him for a second, before pointing to a shelf and  
saying "I want that one".<br>

>-----<br>

>After Ranma paid for the daruma, they left the<br>store. \*Akane's  
sure in a better mood than she

>was before,\* Ranma thought as he watched Akane<br>protectively  
cradle the package in her arms. He  
>glanced at a clock that sat in another store<br>>window. \*Oh man,\* he  
thought. \*I still have a  
half hour to go!\* He frantically tried to come up<br>with an idea to  
stall for time, then spied the

>entrance to a small park.<br>

>"Hey, Akane. Let's cut through that park."<br>

>"Isn't that going in the wrong direction?"<br>

>"It's okay. We still have plenty of time to get<br>back to the dojo  
and get in a few hours of  
>practice before bed."<br>

>Ranma walked in the direction of the park as he  
spoke, and Akane automatically fell into step  
>beside him. He almost jumped when she slipped her  
hand into his and gave it a squeeze. They  
>continued on in silence. Ranma enjoyed the warmth  
of Akane's hand in his, and for a while he stopped  
>worrying about their problems. At that moment,  
nothing else mattered. It lasted until he caught  
sight of the park exit, then reality reasserted  
itself and Ranma reluctantly let go of his  
fiancee's hand. Akane's puzzled, slightly hurt  
expression almost made him grasp her hand again  
>but he resisted the urge. Ranma sighed. "We  
gotta get going," he said softly.  
><br>Akane's face seemed to mirror the sadness he felt  
inside, but then she smiled.<br>  
>"Okay," she said, and they left the park.<br>  
-----<br>  
>\*He's going to spar with me for real. He's going  
to spar with me for real!\* The words repeated  
>themselves in Akane's mind over and over as they  
neared home. She wondered if Ranma would change to  
girl form and wear a leotard, or if he would fight  
her as he was. Whichever way, it didn't really  
matter. She was too happy to care. Ranma had just  
proved to her, beyond any doubt, how much he liked  
her.<br>  
>Akane practically flew into the house, calling  
"I'll be right back!" over her shoulder as she ran  
>upstairs to change. She barely heard Ranma shout  
back, "I'll be in the dojo getting things ready."  
>The speed at which she changed clothes was  
astonishing, and then she raced downstairs to the  
dojo. She was surprised to see Ranma waiting at  
the door in his usual clothes.  
><br>"Aren't you going to get changed?" she asked.  
><br>"Huh? What for?"  
><br>Akane grew suspicious. "You're going to help me  
spar in your usual clothes?" As Ranma's eyes  
widened, Akane's spirits sank.  
><br>"Where did you get the idea that I was going to  
spar with you?"<br>  
>"You said you would!" she replied, trying to hold  
back the tears forming in her eyes.  
><br>"No I didn't! I said you would have a real  
sparring session." As he spoke, Ranma slid the  
door open and Akane was treated to a view of the  
entire gymnastics team.<br>  
>Akane stared at the group in shock. Was this what  
Ranma meant? She watched as some of the leotard-  
clad girls warmed up. \*How could I have ever  
thought he would...\* Akane pushed the thought  
aside, ignored Ranma, and joined the group inside  
the dojo. She started to slide the door shut when  
>Ranma grabbed the frame.<br>  
>"Hey! What about me?"<br>  
>"Ranma," Akane said sweetly. "Why don't you go  
and get some refreshments for us?"  
><br>"What?"  
><br>"After all," she continued, picking up a bucket of

>water sitting by the door and dumping it on him.<br>"If you aren't going to spar with me, WHAT GOOD  
>ARE YOU?" Then she closed the door in his face.<br>

>-----<br>

>Ranma stared at the closed door. \*What happened?\*<br>she thought.  
\*Why is she mad?\* After a few  
>moments Ranma decided that it would be best to<br>leave Akane alone for now. \*I'll talk to her

>after the girls go home. Maybe then she'll tell<br>me why she's mad.\* She took off to find hot water  
>and refreshments.<br>

>Kasumi was in the kitchen when Ranma got there.<br>Apparently the eldest Tendo daughter had been  
>thinking ahead, because there was a tray with a<br>variety of snacks sitting on the counter. As  
>Ranma came closer, Kasumi turned around, looked at<br>her and then reached for the teakettle.

><br>"I didn't think it was raining, Ranma."

><br>"It's not."

><br>"Oh, dear. Did Akane get angry again?"

><br>Ranma nodded as he set down the kettle and grabbed  
>a dish towel to dry off.<br>

>"What was she angry about?"<br>

>Ranma's frustration got the better of him. "Beats<br>me!" he said angrily. "She was okay until she saw

>the girls, and then she went nuts!"<br>

>"I thought I heard her say something about getting<br>ready to practice when the two of you got home."

><br>"Yeah, that's right," said Ranma.

><br>"But she didn't know the girls were here, did

>she?" Kasumi paused, and looked at Ranma. "So,<br>who was she planning to practice with?"

><br>"Well, I did tell her that we were going to have a  
>proper training session..." The rest of Ranma's<br>words trailed off as he replayed what he had told

>Akane earlier. "She must have thought I was going<br>to spar with her--but why would she get upset

>over that?"<br>

>Kasumi smiled and shook her head. "I don't know,<br>Ranma. Why don't you ask her after the practice?"

><br>"I plan to," Ranma replied. He turned and picked  
>up the tray. "I just hope I survive."<br>

>-----<br>

>Outside the dojo a female figure stood in the<br>shadows, listening to the sound of voices inside.

><br>\*She's not alone,\* Kodachi thought, \*and worse,  
>she's training! I'll have to take her out when<br>she's by herself.\*

><br>The leotard-clad girl sat down behind a large  
>bush, biding her time.<br>

>-----<br>

>Akane rubbed a sore spot on her leg. She had been<br>so busy watching the clubs that her opponent's

>ribbon had caught her.<br>

>"Akane, don't let yourself get distracted! Keep<br>your eyes on your opponent all the time. Once

>you've avoided the clubs, don't keep looking at<br>them!"

><br>Akane stopped rubbing her leg and got into a ready

>position. "Okay."<br>>After her initial anger at Ranma had faded, Akane<br>had welcomed the girls and eagerly accepted their help. She would deal with her fiance later.<br>After she started training, Akane found that she didn't have time to think about her feelings about<br>him. The girls were giving her no breaks at all, instead going after her with everything they knew.<br>>"Kodachi's not going to go easy on you," said<br>Mayuri, "so we can't either. You're strong, and you're fast. You just don't know the tools as<br>well as you need to. We have four days to fix that."<br>>\*Four days,\* thought Akane. \*I HAVE to be ready.\*<br>Then she jumped as a ribbon spun toward her, at the same time attacking with her hoop. Seconds<br>later she was down on the mat, entangled in the ribbon.<br>>"I thought I jumped over it!"<br>>"Don't 'think,' Akane! "DO!"<br>>Nodding grimly, the heir to the Tendo Dojo got to<br>her feet and prepared to try again. She was about to continue when she heard the door slide open,<br>and Ranma entered the dojo. He had changed back and was carrying a tray of snacks.<br>>Akane tried to ignore him and concentrate on her<br>opponents, but his words kept popping up. "I give you my word that you will have a proper training<br>session tonight." The hurt surged up in her again. She was almost able to get control of it<br>when she heard a swishing sound in front of her. >Akane was barely able to dodge the thrown hoop,<br>and wasn't able to avoid the follow up ribbon attack. As she fell to the mat, Akane let out a<br>curse.

><br>"Akane, that was awful!" she heard Mayuri say.  
>"What happened?"<br>>"Sorry, I got distracted."<br>>"Well, don't! If you do that in the match,<br>Kodachi will tear you to pieces!"<br>The words hit Akane hard. She noted that it must have shown on her face because Mayuri's anger<br>faded.

><br>"Look," her coach said. "I know Ranma is good looking, but you still can't let yourself do<br>that."<br>Akane blushed, then stood back up. "I'm ready."

><br>-----<br>Ranma winced as Akane hit the mat again. He knew that fall had to hurt, yet he couldn't help but<br>feel a small bit of pride when she immediately got back up and readied herself to try again. \*She's<br>tough,\* he thought. \*Good. She's gonna need to be.\* He continued to watch as they trained,<br>turning his attention to gauging their skill and how it would stack up against Kodachi. After a<br>while, Ranma had pretty much figured out how each of them would fare against the insane gymnast. It<br>didn't look too good. Only Mayuri looked like she could beat Kodachi in a fair fight.<br>Unfortunately, Kodachi didn't

fight fair.

><br>Then he turned his attention to Akane. Up until  
>then, Ranma had never really judged his fiancee's<br>martial arts  
abilities. He let his eyes linger on  
>every move she made. There were rough spots that<br>he could have  
taken advantage of easily, and while  
>Kodachi was nuts, she also was very good at her<br>sport. She too  
would have no difficulty seeing or  
>taking advantage of the openings. He was about to<br>say something  
about it when Mayuri's voice cut  
>through the dojo.<br>  
>"Akane! You're leaving yourself too open!<br>Tighten up your  
defense!"  
><br>"Okay."

><br>Ranma bit back a smile as he watched them resume

>practice.<br>

>-----<br>

>"Akane! You're leaving yourself too open!"<br>  
>Kodachi grinned at the sounds coming from the<br>dojo, as she  
crouched in the bushes by the door.  
>\*Perfect. Taking Tendo out will be easy. How<br>considerate of the  
other ladies to tire her out  
>for me.\* Her grin widened. \*It will be an added<br>bonus to teach  
the Furinkan team once and for all  
>not to oppose their betters.\*<br>  
>She shifted position, and wondered how long it<br>would be before  
the practice session ended. It  
>was an hour before the gymnast heard her answer.<br>  
>"That's enough for tonight."<br>  
>The sounds of laughter and conversation as<br>everyone gathered  
their equipment together drifted  
>through the doors.<br>  
>"Akane, you're going to need to soak tonight."<br>  
>\*Ranma? What is my beloved doing in there?\*<br>  
>"What?" asked Akane.<br>  
>"I--I mean you gotta be sore from missing all of<br>those blocks!"

><br>"I didn't miss THAT many!"

><br>"Sure you did! That's why you need the practice!"

><br>Kodachi was furious. \*Don't let that little tramp  
talk to you that way! My poor darling Ranma!<br>Never fear! Soon you  
will be free of her, I swear  
>it!\* She watched as the dojo door slid open and<br>the girls from  
the team began to exit, calling out  
>cheerful goodbyes.<br>  
>\*Where is she?\* Kodachi thought. \*Could she be--\*<br>the voices from  
inside the dojo interrupted her  
>thought.<br>  
>"You okay, Akane?"<br>  
>"Yes. Thank you for inviting the girls over."<br>

>-----<br>

>Something in the tone of Akane's voice made Ranma<br>doubt her  
sincerity.

><br>"You're still mad at me for not sparring with you.

>It ain't that important."<br>

>"Dummy! You made me think you were going to spar<br>with me, and  
then you pulled a switch! How do you

>think that made me feel!" Akane pushed past him<br>and began to

leave the dojo. In her haste, she  
>failed to see the ball lying on the floor.<br>  
>"Akane, look out!"<br>  
>With a burst of speed, Ranma grabbed Akane around<br>the waist and pulled her back.  
><br>"What are you doing!" he heard Akane yell.  
><br>"Keeping you from tripping over that ball!"  
><br>Akane looked at the floor. "Oh," she said in a very small voice.<br>  
>"Ya gotta be more careful! I ain't gonna be<br>kissing Kodachi because you can't look where  
>you're going!" As he spoke, Ranma turned around,<br>tripped on the ball, and fell flat on his face.  
>When he peeled his face off the floor Akane was<br>standing there laughing hysterically.  
><br>"What's so funny?"  
><br>"Nothing. Nothing at all."  
><br>Ranma growled as Akane smiled and walked towards the door. He got up and kicked the ball as hard<br>as he could, and it bounced off the far wall and ricocheted straight at Akane. He only had time to<br>yell her name before the ball would have collided with her head. Suddenly, Akane dropped to the<br>floor, letting the ball pass above her and out the open door.<br>  
-----<br>  
>As she saw Akane leave the dojo, Kodachi couldn't<br>help but smile.  
\*Just a few more steps...NOW!\*<br>  
>Silently, the gymnast leapt over the bush on a<br>perfect path towards her prey. Much to her surprise, Akane dropped to the floor. "What?"<br>The rest of her words were cut off when a ball hit her square in the face.<br>  
-----<br>  
>Ranma walked past Akane and out of the dojo.<br>"C'mon, lets go see if Kasumi left any more snacks  
>in the kitchen. There's nothing left here."<br>  
>"Okay."<br>  
>Akane followed Ranma into the house. Neither she<br>nor her fiance noticed Kodachi's unconscious form lying in the bushes. They passed Kasumi on their<br>way in.  
  
><br>"Are the trays still in the dojo?" she asked.  
><br>"Sorry, I forgot!" replied Akane. "I'll go back."  
><br>"That's all right. I'll take care of it," said her sister.<br>  
>Kasumi retrieved the trays and locked up the dojo.<br>Something that sounded like a light snore attracted her attention, and she went over to the<br>bushes to look. She was surprised at the sight of the unconscious gymnast.<br>  
>"Oh my."<br>  
>A few minutes later she returned with a pillow and<br>a light blanket, and attempted to make Kodachi more comfortable. "Honestly," she said, "I wish<br>Ranma's friends would be more careful where they sleep!"<br>  
-----<br>  
>\*Now is the perfect time to apologize,\* Ranma<br>thought as he watched Kasumi leave the room.

>\*What should I say? Hmm, what about "I can't spar with you, Akane. I'm not good at this."  
>Yeah, like she'd believe that!\*  
>Ranma wrinkled his brow and thought some more.  
>\*What about if I tell her I'm afraid she'll get  
>hurt?\* He snapped his fingers. \*Yeah! That'll work!\*  
><br>"Hey, Akane," Ranma started to say. Then he  
>realized she was gone.  
>\*Maybe I'll apologize tomorrow,\* he thought.  
  
>-----  
>Upstairs, Akane was holding the daruma in her left hand, and a paintbrush in her right. \*I have to  
>get these eyes just right, so the daruma will work.\*  
><br>Five minutes later, she smiled proudly. "Wow, I  
>didn't think I could do it!" she said in a soft voice. For a minute, her mind went back to her  
>walk in the park, holding Ranma's hand. Then she pushed it aside.  
  
><br>\*The jerk! Why can't he take me seriously? It's like he doesn't want to back me, or he doesn't want people to know he's rooting for me.\* She  
>shook her head at the last thought. \*Stop it, Akane. He wants you to win, otherwise why would  
>he have set up the training session?\* Akane's conflicting thoughts were getting to be too much  
>to handle, so she pushed the daruma away, gathered her bath things together, and headed back  
>downstairs.  
>-----  
>The ringing of the final bell of the next school day woke Ranma from his self-induced coma. He had chosen to dream away his last class rather than deal with the fact that Akane wasn't pleased with him. There wasn't much he could do about it until they got home. He and Akane were assigned to clean the classroom, but he doubted if he'd be able to get her to talk to him while they did.  
><br>As the students began to file out, Ranma started stacking chairs on the desks so that Sayuri, who was also assigned to clean, could sweep under and between them. Akane picked up her broom, turned her back on Ranma, and began at the front of the room with the area near the teacher's desk.  
>Ranma had just finished the last chair when a sudden premonition made him turn around. One of the ceiling tiles near the open window had buckled. Suddenly, it burst inward and onto the floor. Along with it, the familiar figure of Kodachi landed lightly on the floor. She was ready for battle.  
>-----  
>Sayuri continued to sweep as she watched her friends. She had noticed the tension between them, but hadn't had the chance to grill Akane on it. She was pretty sure she could guess why they were so tense. It was the match with Kodachi.  
>Then she jumped back when the ceiling near her caved in. She also noticed who had caused it to fall.

><br>\*Kodachi! Why can't you leave our school alone!\*  
>she thought angrily. Almost by reflex, she swung<br>her broom and hit the gymnast in the face. The  
>force of the blow caused Kodachi to stumble back.<br>Unfortunately, the only thing behind her was an  
>open window. Sayuri watched in shock as the<br>invader fell out said window and down to the  
>ground, landing with a loud thump.<br>  
>All she could say was "oops!"<br>  
>The three friends rushed to the window and looked<br>down at the unconscious Black Rose.  
><br>"Should we get the nurse?" Akane asked.  
><br>The other two looked at her, then all three  
>answered at the same time.<br>  
>"Nah!"<br>  
-----<br>  
>Kodachi swayed slightly as she walked towards the<br>Furinkan gate.  
\*That hurt,\* the gymnast thought  
>as she leaned against the wall. The sound of<br>laughter made her look at the window she had  
>fallen out of a few minutes before.<br>  
>\*Curse you, Akane Tendo! No one laughs at a<br>Kuno!\* she thought.  
  
><br>"Sister?"  
><br>Kodachi turned to look at her brother, who was  
>walking towards her dressed in his usual kendo<br>outfit. "Hello, brother. How nice to see you  
>again," she replied, in a tone of voice that<br>contradicted her words.  
><br>Tatewaki seemed to ignore her comment and looked  
>at her. "Are you well? You appear to be a little<br>worse for wear."  
  
><br>Kodachi bristled. "If I seem less than my usual  
>perfect self, it is the fault of your precious<br>Akane Tendo!"  
Kodachi couldn't help but smirk at  
>the sight of her brother's scowl and clenched jaw.<br>  
>"Have a care, woman," he growled. "How dare you<br>speak of Akane in such a way? She is a ferocious  
>angelic goddess of battle!"<br>  
>"You've been reading the thesaurus again, haven't<br>you, dear brother?!"  
><br>"No matter! Even if I have it is of no  
>consequence. Once I vanquish that foul sorcerer<br>Saotome it will prove to her the depth of my  
>feelings."<br>  
>Kodachi's eyes widened. "Ranma-sama a sorcerer?<br>It is more likely that your Akane is the true  
>practitioner of the dark arts. Not him!"<br>  
>"ENOUGH!" Tatewaki moved into a combat stance.<br>"You were warned!  
Now face the wrath of the Blue  
>Thunder of Furinkan High!"<br>  
>By that time, Kodachi had somewhat recovered from<br>her fall and evaded her brother's attack. "I'm  
>sorry, brother dear, but I just don't have the<br>time for this."  
She leaped over the wall and  
>vanished, her brother in hot pursuit.<br>  
-----<br>  
>\*Where the heck did she put that negative?\*<br>Nabiki was thoroughly frustrated. She had hurried  
>home just to have time to search her sister's<br>room, and was

having no success at all. \*I'll bet  
>she stuffed it into her bra!\* She searched a  
little more but soon  
realized it was hopeless.  
><br>\*I can't believe it. First they outsmart me, and  
now I can't find the negative. I'm supposed to be<br>the one on  
top!\* Nabiki started to fume when she  
heard the faint sounds of the girls on the  
gymnastics team talking to Kasumi downstairs. She  
was about to straighten up the room when the  
middle Tendo daughter stopped. \*Why bother? If  
anyone asks, I'll just blame it on Kodachi\*<br>Grinning, Nabiki left  
the mess behind her and  
closed the door.<br>  
-----<br>  
>"Whew. I thought we'd never finish!" Akane said<br>after they left  
the school.  
><br>"Yeah!" Sayuri replied. "Stupid Kodachi and her  
flowers!"<br>  
>Ranma laughed as he walked on top of the brick  
wall. "I think she  
wasn't expecting to make that  
quick of an exit, though."<br>  
>Akane and Sayuri joined him in laughter at the  
memory for a few  
seconds, until Akane gasped. "Oh  
>no! We're going to be late!"<br>  
>"Late?" Ranma asked. Then he remembered. "Shoot!<br>You can't miss  
any training time!"  
><br>"Training time?" Sayuri asked.  
><br>"Yeah, Ranma has the entire Furinkan gymnastics  
team helping me get ready for Kodachi." Akane<br>turned to Ranma as  
he jumped off the fence. "Come  
>on! If we run maybe I can get some practice in<br>today."  
  
><br>"Won't be fast enough. You're gonna miss a lot,"  
>Ranma replied. "Unless--" The pigtailed martial  
artist quickly swept Akane up in his arms.  
><br>"RANMA!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"  
><br>"Getting you home as fast as possible! Now hang  
on! Bye Sayuri!"<br>  
>Before Sayuri could reply, they were out of sight.<br>  
-----<br>  
>Kodachi cursed as she watched Ranma and Akane land  
in front of  
the Tendo house. \*Damn you, brother,  
why did your defeat have to take so long? Now I  
can't 'greet' her  
in her room!\* She almost  
considered going to the girl's room anyway, but  
dismissed it. It  
hadn't worked the first time,  
and a small part of her doubted it would now.<br>\*What I need,\* the  
gymnast thought as she watched  
her nemesis rush over to the dojo, \*is a place she  
would never  
suspect.\*  
><br>While she mulled over the problem, Kodachi heard  
the faint sounds of training coming from the dojo.<br>\*Yes, little  
girls. Train until your peasant  
bodies reek of sweat. It will do you no good.\*<br>Kodachi smiled as  
the location floated to the  
forefront of her mind.<br>  
>\*The bathroom. Perfect!\* The girl slipped  
quietly into the house  
and made her way to the  
bathroom. Once inside, she made a quick  
examination of the room.

It was rather small by  
>her standards but she would have to make do. A<br>moment later she  
was hanging onto the ceiling.  
>\*Hmm, this will do. Soon, you little witch.<br>Soon.\* she thought,  
as visions of retribution  
>against the Tendo girl danced in her head.<br>  
>The sound of heavy footsteps from the hall<br>interrupted her  
daydream. \*Is it her? No, the  
>sounds are too heavy.\* The bathroom door opened<br>and confirmed her  
thought when a large black and  
>white panda came in. Before it shut the door, she<br>heard a female  
voice call out. "Mr. Saotome! You  
>forgot these!" She watched as Kasumi Tendo<br>entered the room and  
handed the creature some  
>bathing supplies. Kodachi was amazed when the<br>panda held up a  
sign saying "Thank you Kasumi".  
><br>The gymnast wrinkled her nose. \*They let their  
>pet bathe in the same room as them? Disgusting!\*<br>She continued to  
watch the panda as it made its  
>way to the tub. Her eyes bulged out and she<br>almost lost her grip  
on the ceiling when she saw  
>the panda enter the hot bath. The moment it<br>touched the water,  
the panda transformed to a  
>large, balding man. "W-what is--" The rest of<br>her words faltered  
when she lost her grip. The  
>man looked up just as she fell.<br>  
-----<br>  
>Genma leaned back in the tub. It was good to be able <br>to change  
back.  
><br>"W-what is--"  
><br>The sound made him open his eyes, just in time to  
>see a beautiful, leotard-clad girl fall into the<br>bath. He moved  
back slightly as she lifted her head  
>out of the water and stared at him. "Ummmm...hello?"<br>Genma said.  
  
><br>Her scream shook the house.

## 7. chapter 7

A Kiss To The Victor  
><br>A Ranma 1/2 Fanfic by Hound & Cabbit Productions-  
>(David "Fido" Lindquist and June "KaraOhki" Geraci )<br>  
>Revised October 11, 2004<br>  
>Ranma 12 was created by Rumiko Takahashi. We're just borrowing  
her chracters for a little while.

Authors' notes: It's been almost two years but this chapter is done.

>It's been a particularly hard road both of us have traveled to  
get<p>  
  
it here. Real Life has been throwing obstacles in our way since  
we  
  
started. Due to our troubles, we have decided to shorten our  
original  
  
outline and break it into 'books'. We make no promises the

other

'books' will ever be written by us but this one will be concluded in

the next chapter. We only hope that chapter 8 doesn't take as long

to write...:)

><br>Enjoy!.. Or not. We don't care cause it's done! DONE YOU HEAR!

>DONE! DONE! DONE! BWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!<br>

>(Kara pulls the keyboard away from Fido and swats him with it)<br>

>There's something to be said about being in the same room with your<p>

writing partner. Too bad we live so far apart - this is a first.

><br>-----

><br>Chapter Seven

><br>"See you tomorrow, Akane!" called the girls on the team as they

left. Akane waved goodbye, then she closed the gate.

><br>"Let's hurry up and get the mats put away, Ranma,"

>she said, as the two of them returned to the dojo.<br>"I need a bath!"

><br>"I think you got some time to kill," he replied.

>"Pop just went in there."<br>

>"Oh? In that case I'll sweep. Would you please pick up the<p>

gymnastics tools and put them away for me?"

><br>When Ranma was finished, he sat down on the floor by the

dojo doors and watched his fiancee sweep. She was rather

disheveled after her practice, and appeared totally focused on

what she was doing. Ranma didn't mind her absorption in her

task, since this gave him the chance to enjoy watching her.

The

peaceful scene was shattered by a scream from the house.

"What the--?" Ranma was cut off when Akane ran over him

and out the door.

><br>-----

><br>Kodachi gazed vacantly at the panda-turned-man sitting in the

bath. How--how could this-- the rest of her thought vanished as

her grip slipped. Before Kodachi could catch herself, she fell

into the bath, on top of him. She flailed around wildly in an

attempt to get out, but was hampered by his efforts to also leave

the bath.

><br>Suddenly, the sound of the door sliding open stopped them cold. Kodachi turned to see the entire Tendo family plus a tiny,

wrinkled old man staring at the scene.

><br>"Hotcha!" said the old man. "I never thought you had it in

you!"

><br>The others just stared, their mouths wide open.

><br>"Hey!" She heard Ranma-sama's voice call out, "what's going--" She

was devastated at the shocked expression on his face when he peeked in to see what was going on.

><br>"NOOOOOOO!" Kodachi screamed as she burst out of the bath and raced through the witnesses of her ultimate humiliation. As

Kodachi fled, she looked down to see that the little old man was

firmly attached to her bosom.

><br>"How about taking a bath with me, sweetcakes?"

><br>"AAAH!!! A DEMON!" She grabbed the creature, drove him through a nearby wall, and fled out of the house and into the night.

><br>The Tendo family was still in shock at the scene they had just

witnessed. They looked at the door Kodachi had just exited through

and then at Genma, who had wrapped a towel around himself in an

effort to preserve what little dignity he had left.

><br>"Ummmm," he said. "This isn't my fault."

><br>"I don't even want to know," replied Ranma as he walked out.

><br>-----

><br>Kodachi tried to hold back the tears as she ran home. How could

her plan have gone so awry? What was causing all these humiliating

setbacks? Once home, she quickly grabbed her bathing things and

locked herself in the bathroom. After making sure no one or nothing

was hiding in the room waiting to pounce, she stripped off her wet

leotard and began to scrub herself thoroughly, trying to make certain

that the creature that had grabbed her had left no traces behind.

><br>After she used up the third bottle of her homemade rose-scented

bath gel, she rinsed off, placed her towel on the edge of the tub, and

sank into the steaming water.

"I must think logically," she said aloud. "I am a Kuno, and we are

intelligent and logical. There has to be an explanation for this."

She thought for a moment, and then began counting on her

fingers, speaking aloud as she listed each instance.

><br>"One. Akane Tendo hit me when I confronted her in the home

economics room. She should not have been able to lay a finger

on me.

><br>"Two. I was hit with that ball while I was waiting for the girl to

come out of that pathetic little dojo of hers.

><br>"Three. I was hit with a broom and pushed out of Akane's

classroom window."

><br>"Then," she shuddered, "tonight."

><br>Kodachi forced herself to calm down, and once again tried to

think. There must be something that connects all of these

incidents. Something that I don't see.

><br>The gymnast closed her eyes and let the information tumble

around in her mind, until she was interrupted by the sounds of

her brother returning home.

><br>"Curse you, foul sorcerer!" she heard him shout. " I will free

my dear Akane and the pigtailed girl from your evil clutches

yet!"

The rest of Tatewaki's raving went unheard as Kodachi sat up, her

eyes widening in response to the words. All of the pieces had

finally fallen into place.

><br>"Oh brother," she whispered. "You are so wrong. I fear that you

have fallen under her influence as well. Slowly, Kodachi sank back

into the tub, her expression grim and serious. The upcoming battle

had just taken on new proportions. This was no longer a fight for a

kiss, but for Ranma's soul. And her opponent was not some

ordinary peasant schoolgirl. No, not at all.

><br>I must be careful. I can't afford any more feeble attempts at victory

now. I must wail 'til the match and prepare for her evil magicks, then

I will expose her and free my precious Ranma from her clutches once and for all! Her dark laughter echoed throughout the house.

><br>-----

><br>As night fell in Nerima, Soun and Genma began another game of

Go. The only manmade sound was the clatter of pots and pans coming from the kitchen, a sign that Kasumi was still up and around. Ranma, Akane, and Nabiki were already in bed, somewhat worn out by the day's events, and Master Happosai had gone on his raids, so a relative calm had settled over the house.

><br>"Old friend?" Soun said, as he moved his first piece. "You realize

that the Kuno woman wasn't there to see you, don't you?"

><br>Genma's eyes widened, then quickly changed to an inscrutable

expression. "Of course, Tendo! I'm not stupid," he replied, trying

to hide the sweat drop behind his head.

><br>"So what do you think she was here for?"

><br>Genma puffed out his chest. "To see my son! He is a man amongst men, after all!"

><br>"Yes, he is," Soun said, in a voice that left no doubt he wasn't

thrilled with the response.

>"However, I don't think that was the reason for her visit. I believe<p>

she meant harm to Akane."

><br>"It is possible, but not a problem! As a matter of fact, it could be

a blessing in disguise!"

><br>"What do you mean?" Soun asked, as he raised an eyebrow.

><br>"We can get the boy to watch her night and day! It will bring them

much closer!"

><br>Soun's somber mood brightened considerably. "Of course!"

Brilliant, Saotome! You go tell him right now!" As Genma left, Soun

quickly changed some of the pieces to ones in his favor.

><br>-----

><br>As Genma climbed the stairs, he congratulated himself on the brilliance

of his plan. The more time the boy spends with his fiancee, the closer

the two will become. After the match, they should be so attached to

each other that they will practically BEG us to let them get married.

><br>"Boy," he said, as he opened the door to their room, "you need to

get...up?" The room was empty. Genma ran back downstairs and

rushed up to Soun.

><br>"Tendo, Ranma's gone!"

><br>Soun jumped to his feet. "Where?"

><br>"I don't know, but we've got to find him. If he's not here, he's not

protecting Akane."

><br>Soun straightened up and looked Genma right in the eye. "Go on

without me, Saotome. I must remain here to protect my little girl!" As

if to reinforce his words, Soun tightened the belt on his gi, and

began

to roll up his sleeves.

><br>Genma gave him a short nod, then ran out of the house, cursing his

son all the way.

><br>-----

><br>Ranma shifted slightly on the branch in an effort to get comfortable. He

could have chosen the roof for his vigil, but decided against it. Kodachi

knew he liked to sit up there, and while the martial artist had no doubts

that he could beat Kodachi in a fair fight, or not so fair one, he'd been

tricked before and this was way too important to mess up now. Taking

a quick look around and realizing that everything was okay, Ranma

turned his attention to Akane's window. He wondered what or even if

she was holding anything as she slept. Maybe I should get her

something, he mused, now that P-chan's not around.

><br>Before his thoughts could turn to the whereabouts of his rival, he

heard his father leaving the house.

"That ungrateful, lazy boy!"

><br>The words irritated the martial artist. What does that fool want

now? he thought.

><br>"How dare he run out on his fiancee!"

><br>For a moment, Ranma considered calling out to his father. Then he

changed his mind. Let the old man go looking for me. If I'm not

sleeping tonight, neither should he.

><br>-----

><br>The next few days seemed to fly by for Akane. She went running

early, attended school, practiced with the girls, did her homework,

and collapsed. Literally. Kodachi seemed to be laying low. No one

had even seen her. The only things that disturbed her were Ranma's irritability and tiredness, and the intensity of his and Genma's morning battles.

They seemed to have increased in seriousness and, in Akane's opinion, viciousness. Every time Genma would dump Ranma in the pond he'd return the favor in spades. It had finally gotten to the point where after Ranma would toss his father in, he would repeatedly jump up and down on him for good measure.

His behavior was beginning to worry her. She looked over at Ranma's desk, where the martial artist was now sleeping, and frowned. He must be really worried if he's losing sleep at night over this, she thought. She would have liked to put his fears to rest, but she couldn't, because her own thoughts were the same. She had yet to beat Mayuri in a match, and while everyone was saying that she was getting better, the looks on their faces said it wouldn't be enough.

><br>-----  
><br>The day before the match, as Akane left her classroom, Ms. Kitami

confronted her. She was carrying a glass containing an evil-looking green liquid.

"I made this nutritional drink for you! It contains all of your daily

vitamin requirements, plus antioxidants, protein, and calcium!" She

held out the glass with both hands, smiling. "Come, now. Drink up!"

For one brief moment, Akane had an inkling of how Ranma felt

when

she approached him with her cooking. Unfortunately, there was no way

for her to refuse the drink.

><br>"Thank you," she murmured, as she took the glass and raised it to her

lips. To her surprise, despite the drink's appearance, it didn't taste as

awful as she'd anticipated. It was a little bit on the spicy side, with a

touch of citrus.

><br>Ms. Kitami smiled happily, retrieved the glass, and walked away. Just

before she turned the corner she looked back at Akane.

"I'll make you another just before the match tomorrow!"

><br>The full effect of the drink hit Akane just as her teacher

vanished.

"HOT!" she shouted, amazed that flames were not shooting from

her open mouth. Akane ran to the water fountain, running over

Ranma, who was between her and it.

><br>"Somethin' wrong?" asked her fiance as he picked himself off the

floor.

><br>It took another minute for Akane to be able to take her face out of the

water fountain and speak.

"Ask Ms. Kitami to take it easy on the wasabi next time."

><br>-----

><br>Nabiki observed as Akane and the rest of the team practiced in the

dojo. Her searches so far had proved totally useless. Ranma's room,

Akane's and Ranma's lockers--she'd even tried to search Kasumi's

room, but the negatives never turned up. Her sister had to be hiding

them somewhere, but short of Akane telling her where they were, she

hadn't a clue where to find them.

><br>Growing bored with watching Akane jump around, Nabiki turned her

attention to the other girls and Ranma. The looks

they gave Akane when she wasn't watching spoke volumes.

><br>They don't think she can win. Nabiki's fingers gripped the window

frame tightly. I think I can use this.

><br>-----

><br>Ranma watched Akane go through her routine again. She had

improved--her moves were crisper and more precise, and she had

much more control over the weapons. As he glanced at the other

girls, he could see the support they had for her, but the slight frown

on Mayuri's face confirmed what he had already figured out.

><br>It's not going to be enough, he said to himself. It would take her at

least another month before she could match Kodachi in skill, and

that doesn't include dealing with Kodachi's view of 'fair play'. He

watched her do a flip, then lash out with her ribbon. Kodachi's had a streak of bad luck, but she's still more than capable of

winning. Unless Kodachi underestimates her or messes up again,

Akane's gonna lose. She's gonna lose, and then I'm gonna have to kiss...ugh...Kodachi. The thought of having to fulfill the wager

made him sick. There has to be a way to give her an edge, the

thought. Ranma scratched his head, then smiled. Yeah! It would work! If she can pull it off, the fight will be over in no time!

><br>Ranma heard the applause as Akane finished her routine. I'll talk

to her after she takes her bath.

><br>-----

><br>Akane found Ranma waiting for her when she left the bathroom.

><br>"You got a minute, Akane?"  
><br>"It's late, Ranma. I want to go to bed."  
><br>"This won't take long. I need to teach you a special technique  
for

tomorrow."

><br>"A special technique?" Before Ranma could say another  
word,

Akane grabbed him and dragged him to the dojo.

><br>As the door slid closed, Ranma stammered out "I--I guess  
you

want to learn it?"

><br>-----

><br>Soun smiled as he watched the koi pond. It was a symbol  
of

tranquility, something his household had lacked since the arrival  
of his best friend and Ranma. From that moment on, his life had  
been turned upside-down. There was always something going  
on,

whether it was from an outside source or between Ranma and  
his

little girl. It was always strange, dangerous, or both.

><br>The outer threats were easy to handle. Find the problem. Figure  
out

how to beat it. Beat it in a duel. End of problem.

><br>What disturbed him the most were the battles between Ranma  
and

his baby. Every insult by Ranma directed towards her hurt him.  
However,

the insults and angry blows by Akane made him feel as though  
someone

had driven hot knives into his heart.

><br>It was at those times that Akane reminded him of her mother  
before

they married. Akane's mother was always quick to anger,  
especially

when it came to him, but she was also the first to help out if things  
got

bad. They couldn't even admit to themselves that they cared for  
each

other. It took a major earthquake to make them realize it. Soun bit  
back

a sob as he remembered holding what he thought was her lifeless  
body

in his arms. Telling her that he loved her, and to his surprise, her telling

him the same thing.

><br>He sighed softly, then turned to the dojo. Despite the "difficulties"

between then, Ranma and his daughter had seemed to form strong

bonds. Lately, it seemed that those bonds were forming into something more. The sight of Ranma up in the tree outside Akane's

window, guarding her, reinforced that belief. This was a delicate

situation. Soun knew that, from personal experience. That was why he hadn't told his closest friend where his son had been for the past

few nights. Ranma didn't need any more pressure put upon him.

><br>At least not now. Akane needed Ranma to train and protect her until

the match was over. Then he and Genma could concentrate on getting

the two of them together. Once they were married, the arguments

would stop, and everything would be fine.

><br>"You sex-changing, arrogant, perverted blowhard!"

><br>The shout shook Soun from his reminiscing, and he sighed again

at the sound of Akane's voice. "It won't be a moment too soon."

><br>-----

><br>Some time in the middle of the night, Ranma tried to find another

position in the tree for his tired body. He couldn't understand it. No

one had seen Kodachi since she ran out of the Tendo bathroom.

>Ranma hoped that she was okay.<br>

>"I guess seeing Pop in the buff scared her off," he mused<p>

aloud.

><br>-----

><br>"Miss, the library is about to close. You'll have to return those books

to the reference department."

><br>"Just a moment! I need to make a few more notes!"

><br>The librarian looked at Kodachi and attempted to be patient.

"I'll give

you five minutes."

><br>For the next five minutes, the only sound in the room was the scratching

of Kodachi's pen as she furiously took notes. She closed the book and

gathered her notes together just as the librarian returned to her

table. "Thank you, I believe this is what I've been looking for. You

may return these books to their proper place."

><br>The librarian glanced at the titles of the books as she carried them back

to the reference department.

"What on earth is that girl up to?" she wondered aloud, as she returned

them to the occult/supernatural section.

><br>-----

><br>Kodachi ran as fast as she could. The market she needed would be

closing soon, and it was imperative that she pick up the items she

needed before it did.

"With these in my arsenal, nothing Akane Tendo can do will affect

me! I will be invincible!" Her laughter scared the few shoppers in

the store onto the street.

End  
file.